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IN THE RED HILLS

ELLIOTT CRAYTON M'CANTS



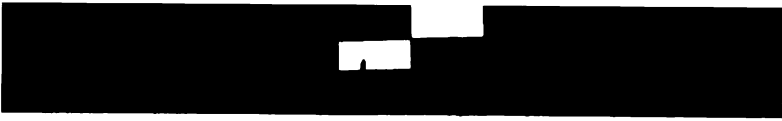




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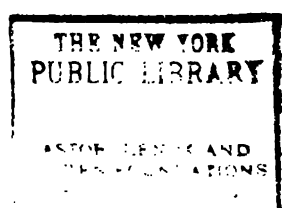
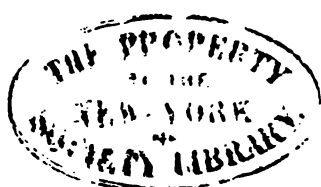


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IN THE RED HILLS







**"The voice was full and strong to Annie it seemed compelling.
She was busy just then, but she pushed her work aside."**

(See page 98)



IN THE RED HILLS

A STORY OF
THE CAROLINA COUNTRY

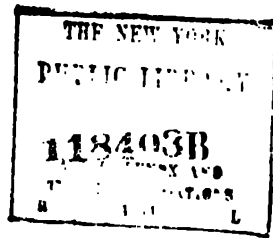
BY
ELLIOTT CRAYTON McCANTS

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PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL

BILLY MAYSON, who, beginning as a boy, grows up and becomes a lawyer

JOHN MAYSON, a planter, Billy Mayson's grandfather

JOHN ARCHER, alias Croull, adventurer, money-lender and local capitalist

ANNIE CHAMBLISS, a young lady neighbour of the Maysons

MRS. MARY CHAMBLISS, mother of Annie

LUKE SULLIVAN, a member of the "poor white" class

LONG JERRY BINNS, Luke's stepfather

MRS. BINNS, Luke's mother

JASON SIMPKINS, Luke's uncle on the distaff side

LAURA GRAY, a young lady

ABRAM, a Negro servant

"**AUNT CLAIRSY**," mother of Abram

"**MAMMY**" **NANCY**, a voodoo witch-doctress and foster-mother to Billy Mayson

TOM LOGIN, the sheriff

THE SCHOOLMASTER, a Kentuckian

Location—Southern

Time—Nineteenth century, in the seventies and eighties



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- "The voice was full and strong—to Annie it seemed compelling. She was busy just then, but she pushed her work aside." . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

- "Very ostentatiously Archer looked into package after package, muttering all the while his comments." 114
- ". . . Mrs. Chambliss and Annie sitting on the porch in the purple twilight, awaiting Billy's approach." 230





IN THE RED HILLS





CHAPTER I

IN WAR TIME

IT was a September morning—September in 1863—and the land was war-cursed. On that narrow divide which parts the lower reaches of the Tennessee River from the waters of the Cumberland a wide stretch of unbroken forest lay, ravine-scarred and forbidding. It was only along the streams that clearings and cultivated land bespoke the habitations of men; and even these seemed lonely and deserted. For of the farmers and labourers many were gone—some to their rest under the shot-scarred walls of Fort Donelson or under the earthen ramparts of Fort Henry, others to fill the gaps in that thin gray line of fighting men who, now pressed far to the southward, still thought that they could easily bear to die but could not bear to yield. And those who remained—the old men, the children and the women—were cursed with a haunting fear, and trembled and cowered and hid themselves, hoping vainly to be passed unnoticed.

For, when the contending armies had fought and had marched away and these non-combatants were left helpless in their humble homes, there had arisen in this wild and desolate tract bands of ruffianly men who, cloaking themselves with either flag as time and occasion served, cared really for neither, save as a pretext for murder and robbery and rape. At the hands of these pitiless marauders widows

and fatherless children saw their houses pillaged and their last measure of meal consumed, daring not to complain lest a far worse thing befall them. Old men, tremulous with the weight of years, were roasted slowly to death over fires of blazing wood in efforts to make them produce the dollars which they did not possess; tender women in the long, dark watches of the night, when no human help was nigh and even God himself seemed far away, were—— But the heart grows sick and one's lips refuse to utter the story of their nameless wrongs. Sometimes, as they had opportunity, the soldiers avenged these things—the Confederates because they were husbands and fathers and sons, the Federals because they were men—therefore, woe to the soldier, be his uniform blue or gray, who, journeying unwarily, fell into the bushwhacker's hands.

But in the dark early hours of the autumn morning the forest seemed as peaceful and still as it might have been had no such forayers ever existed. Away out to the eastward the gray dawn was breaking, and in the western heavens the morning star still burned, lighting dimly the shadowy trees and the long roads stretching beneath—the gray road leading down to the South and the red road coming out of the West; and over all there was silence, save for the lonely hoot of a belated owl and the sound of the wind in the leaves.

But presently on that southerly road there was a sound of footsteps and of voices, and had one been standing there in the shadows he might have seen approaching a little party of some half-dozen tired men. Their clothing, which should have been gray—for they had owned gray uniforms once—was of new butternut jeans, and only their battered brass

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buttons revealed the service to which they belonged. Singly or by twos—for they were Kentuckians and Confederates—they had made a perilous passage northward through the Federal lines; a foolhardy venture indeed, but by what right does danger count when the homesick travel homeward? Now, braving capture for a second time, they had banded themselves together as their furloughs drew to a close and were travelling south again. Though weary of war, though battling in a hopeless cause, though footsore and tired and weak, the thought never came to them to surrender, to take the allegiance oath, and be safe. Yonder by the Mississippi swamps their comrades were waiting for them, and here on the long gray road they were tramping steadily on. Farther on, after they had passed the lower outposts of the “Yankees” and were in that favoured country which they professed to believe still belonged to Jeff Davis and to God, they would cast caution to the winds and would raise their voices in song. Even here, where Abe Lincoln ruled and the devil was averred to parade in blue, they hummed to themselves in an undertone:

“Oh, git down, boys, an' scratch your grabbel,
For to Dixie's land I'm bound to trabbel.
Look away! look away!”

But the day was breaking; Yankee scouting parties might be astir; and they had travelled all night and were hungry.

“Le's camp, boys,” said one of them, glancing at the east and swinging his knapsack from his shoulders.

“Good,” replied another, and, suiting their action to the words, they turned aside into a dense tangle

of chinkapin bushes that grew at some distance from the road.

Under cover of the thicket they unstrapped their haversacks and breakfasted on the contents. Afterward, their hunger being appeased, they stretched themselves out on the dry leaves that littered the ground and composed themselves to rest. Then their weariness grew heavy upon them, and the cooling breeze whispered pleasantly in their ears, and their eyelids closed gently, and all was still.

Scarcely were they asleep before horsemen appeared on the western road. These wore no uniforms, not so much as a distinguishing button, but they were all heavily armed. Hanging from their saddle-rings, or slung in sacks across the withers of their horses, was the booty from a recent raid. Some bore chickens and ducks, others flour, still others flitches of bacon. One there was who had a woman's homespun skirts thrown across the front of his saddle. Numbering perhaps a score, they rode silently on in the growing light and came to the crossing of the roads.

There, at a signal, they halted, dismounted, considered the freshly made tracks in the dust, and gathered quickly about their leader, a man tall of stature and powerful, with heavy brows overhanging his shifting and cruel eyes. Yesterday their outliers had told them that soldiers were passing south. There was not usually much spoil on the bodies of such, but there might be some, and besides there was revenge to be had, for scarce was there one of the cutthroat crew who had not, at one time or another, been compelled to flee for his life in order to escape the rude justice that the soldiers meted out. A hum of conversation arose, but it



In War Time

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was silenced speedily. If the tracks had been made by soldiers, then their bivouac might be near, hence there was necessity for caution. Twenty against six *were* odds, it is true, but should the six happen to be watching, the twenty might at least lose some one. Each outlaw saw a possibility that he himself might fall—the silence grew very deep.

The leader looked again at the tracks, reflected a moment, and gave an order in an undertone. Then the nondescript crowd, gaunt, shaggy and evil-browed, began to follow up the trace.

As they reached the chinkapin thicket the Captain rubbed his hands and smiled. Just here, to be sure, was an excellent hiding-place—he himself had harboured here in a time of need. Halting his men, he went forward on tiptoe, treading slowly and cautiously. Then he parted the bushes gently and peered in, his black eyes gleaming wolfishly above his sleeping prey.

Rejoining his force, he divided it, sending men to the right and to the left, thus encircling the thicket. Then when all were ready they crept inward, drawing closer and closer with stealthy and catlike steps. At last they halted. The leader raised his open hand. One—two—he signalled, beating the air in an easy cadence, and at his motion the long-barrelled glittering rifles slid noiselessly through the dancing leaves; then, for a moment, he paused.

All unconscious of the impending tragedy, a mocking-bird flitted across the road and burst into a carolling song, a gray squirrel chattered saucily, and an uneasy sleeper moved and muttered—dreaming, no doubt, of his wife's last kiss and of home. Then, as the morning sun shot its light athwart the trees, filling the dusty road and the

woods with a blaze of glory, the outlaw hissed and the rifles cracked spitefully, and there were cries and curses and groans. And, as the blue smoke drifted past, the guerrilla captain laughed like a man well pleased with his work.

But after all the murderous task was not well done, for one soldier—a mere lad he was, too young by far for such rude wakenings—stood all unhurt, and gazed about bewildered and questioning; and from the ruck of the dead another man dragged himself painfully, moaning and begging for water.

Recovering his senses at the sound, the boy sprang to the wounded man and held a canteen to his lips. Then with a troubled brow he looked at his captors expectantly, and as his eye met that of their leader a great relief surged into his face, for he knew the man.

"Ezra!" he cried, "Ezra! Don't you know me, Ezra?"

He did not wait for any reply. In his tones was the confidence of one who speaks to a well-trying friend—the assurance that immediately he would have aid and ready sympathy.

"This is Sam, Ezra," he continued.

But the man addressed did not respond. Silent he stood and frowned until his shaggy black eyebrows met.

Then the boy came nearer and spoke again, but the assurance in his voice was gone, and in its stead there came a piteous note of doubt and of wonder.

"You understand, don't you, Ezra? That's Sam, there, and he's hurt. You'll help him, won't you?"

The guerrilla seemed to consider, but as the wounded man turned his face a hard light came into the other's eyes.



"No," he said sharply. "Sam's been a-huntin' for trouble and now he'll get it."

And curling his thin lips into a sardonic laugh, he drew his pistol and stepped forward quickly.

Horror leaped into the eyes of the lad—horror and wild despair.

"Ezra! Ezra!" he screamed. "You're not going to——?"

The sharp report of the pistol cut the agonised sentence short, and a blow from the butt of a gun sent the speaker to his knees. The wounded man's head sank slowly back, his body quivered convulsively, then it stiffened and lay still.

Afraid to rise, the boy crept painfully on hands and knees to the lifeless form and raised the bloody head tenderly in his arms.

"Sam!" he called gently. "Sam!"

But there was no answer, for the brown eyes of his brother were glazing into the stony stare of death. The boy bowed himself until his forehead touched the unresponsive clay, and his lips moved softly. Back in the green Kentucky hills the two had been reared—he and his brother. Together they had watched the blue jays swing in the thickets, and for their delight the shy rabbits had peeped from their coverts. Together, too, they had chased the gray squirrels in the shady wood-pasture, had built dams in the little brook, and had listened to the drowsy bees that came and went among the blossoms. And with them always, sharing their sports as he did their home, was an older lad. That one was motherless: they called him Ezra. And in those days the Negroes sang lustily in the fields of ripening corn, and life seemed good, and the sunlight lay tenderly on the hills and on the old plantation.

Now, Sam was dead, and Ezra—— The boy kissed the cold still lips and laid his burden down.

"Dead!" he whispered. "Dead!"

For a moment he sat as if bewildered, then his teeth shut with a click and he sprang up white and panting and faced his captor.

The guerrilla shrank, and even his brutal men shuddered and stepped back, for the eyes of the lad were blazing like those of a demon. Suddenly he found his voice.

"Curse you!" he screamed. "Curse you! Curse you!" and as he ended his wild imprecation, he dashed through the men around him and ran toward the thickets.

"Shoot!" yelled the Captain. "Shoot!" and the deep glens rang with the echoing snap of the rifles, but the boy ran on unharmed and plunged with a shriek of defiance into the depths of the neighbouring ravine.

Some, fearful of their Captain's wrath, followed him for a space, and some stood wondering at his daring escape, but far down the glen they heard him cry again and the echoes rolled weirdly through the solemn woods. Perhaps his sudden scream unnerved the marksmen; perhaps even these, for once, felt pity and aimed their rifles wide; perhaps, for its own ends, Nemesis reserved him. Who knows?

Soon the bushwhackers gave over the hopeless quest and sullenly moved away, the sunshine crept through the quivering leaves, the squirrels chattered in the trees, the flies gathered on the bodies of the dead, and the vultures wheeled high above the spot, waiting for the sun to ripen their ghastly meal.



CHAPTER II

IN WHICH HOOKS ARE BAITED

THE struggle had ended. No more were the blue columns marching, and the last gray squadron had charged. And the South, having placed her all on the grim altars of war, now sat desolate amid the ashes of the sacrifice and the blood of her sons.

In the hills of upper Carolina the old civilisation, which, since the foundation of the Republic, had ever sent its men to the fore, was dead and a newer was taking its place. The great old plantations had largely been broken into smaller farms, the great old houses had fallen into decay, and the white-washed cabins of the "quarters," where once, with an abandon known only to the wearers of a single garment, the black pickaninnies had dozed in the yellow sunshine or played in the yellow sand, were now silent and deserted.

But there were some exceptions. Here and there a man of the old land-holding stock, proud of his ancient lineage, proud of his now unproductive acres, proud of his past and of his people, sought to preserve what he could of his ancient state and to face, unafraid, the uncertain future. It was a losing fight—sooner or later it must end in submission to the order of newer things; but the tall, strong old man looking out across his fields—fields that had been handed down from father to son since the days of an English king—could not bear

to yield them yet. In another generation, perhaps, "when the new had grown old and the old had grown strange," his son or his grandson might forget all this, but as for himself, unbroken the heritage had been received, unbroken it should be transmitted.

But the straight, blue-eyed, yellow-haired boy who was digging bait in the oak-shadowed barn-yard at the Mayson place was not thinking of these things at all. He was capturing red earthworms with which to lure the fish. True, he knew that there had been a very great war. His own father had been killed while engaged in it, so people had told him. And his mother—the pale, sad woman who seemed to him so beautiful—talked to him about it at times and cried over him until his yellow head was wet.

At such times the boy waxed wroth. What right had people to bring about wars and to make his mother cry? He clenched his fists hard when he thought of those tears, and was ready to fight. His was a race that honoured their women and loved them and fought for them. He knew that it was right that a man should fight for his mother, for his grandfather had said so—not to him, of course, but to Mrs. Chambliss, who lived beyond the creek. Therefore he was ready to do battle in the cause, that wars should cease and that his mother should not cry any more.

But he had forgotten that to-day, for he was putting the earthworms into his "bait-gourd," and was rewinding his fishing tackle; and Abram, Mammy Clairisy's boy, was helping him. It had rained last night, and the creek was "up" and the catfish would be sure to bite. So when the tackle



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was finally adjusted and the bait-gourd was full, the two sallied forth, bound for the "big hole" in the stream that flowed at the foot of the farther hill.

And as they climbed the red road that led over the ridges, they stopped a moment and looked back—the Negro fearfully, lest Mammy Clairsy should recall him to his neglected task of weeding in the garden, the white boy with a dawning sense of love and ownership. For very pleasant seemed the old gray house in its setting of gardens and oak trees, and very fair was the broad Carolina landscape. Away to the left of the boys were the fields of ripening grain, and beyond them, all transfigured by the morning sunlight, lay the dark-green stretches of the fragrant pineland. To their right, just where the eastern hills came down to meet the blue Conakka ridges, the quaint little town of Keowee stood, with its narrow streets and its "square" and its threescore straggling houses. And the boy, gazing far-eyed across the hazy and purple valley-land and the oak woods and the hills, let his eye rest on the distant village and smiled, for Keowee is a very old-fashioned town: there are no towns like it any more—the pattern has been lost.

But the boy was thinking of a quiet street that leads beyond the warehouses, and of a red brick office that opens thereon—one Mr. Archer's office, somebody had said that it was—where once upon a time Abram had feasted sumptuously on melons and afterward had seated himself in the sun, considering his digestion and nodding. And it came to pass that, as Abram sat there on the office steps, his woolly head had drooped and jerked back suddenly and drooped again, after the manner of one who would rest. And a goat—it was nothing that a

certain small white boy had privily driven the goat that way—seeing the menacing motion, had construed it as a challenge and had accepted it, and the two heads, the Negro's and the goat's, had met in sudden and violent collision. As the boy thought of this, his smile broadened and he giggled audibly.

At the sound Abram seemed aggrieved.

"What dat you laughin' at, Billy?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Oh—er—nothin'," replied Billy airily, as he laughed the more. Then he winked, and cast a stone at a venturesome catbird that was mewing at him from a haw-bush beside the fence.

But Abram was not satisfied:

"I knows," he said, wagging his head oracularly; "I knows. You'se thinkin' sump'n nuther 'bout dat goat, an' I'se gwine ter git eb'n wid yer yit; I sholy is."

Then a further thought occurred to him and he spoke again with a sudden accession of interest:

"Billy," he queried, "how come dat ar Archer man come ter our house ter-day, an' how come ole marster go ter see dat man dat day las' week when—when you an' me eat dat million on dem orifice steps?"

Billy laughed again and then looked puzzled.

"I don't really know," he replied, "but it's something about money—I heard grandfather say that it was."

Abram nodded his head and looked wise.

"I bet," he remarked decisively, "I jes' bet dat ar man want ter borry money from ole marster." For to the Negro's simple mind "ole marster" was the very embodiment of wisdom and of wealth and resources.

But Billy did not know, and the creek was up and the catfish were just waiting to be caught.

"Come on," he said impatiently, and, turning out into the fields, they crossed them and went on to the "big hole" where they expected the catfish to be. There, however, since the fish were wary and would not bite at all, they stripped and went in swimming, and Abram "ducked" Billy thrice by way of balancing accounts. Afterward, they dressed again and wandered slowly down the stream, trying this place and that with their hooks or peering into the thickets to spy out the vagrant marsh-folk. And after Billy had caught six minnows and a "pearch" and two or three "cats," and Abram had landed a "turkle"—which, of course, once its jaws were fastened on a man, would never loose its hold until there was thunder—they came to the deep still pool that is just above the "big road," and there they stopped and "set" their hooks and lay down on the grass to rest.

In the meantime, old John Mayson, a colonel by courtesy of his neighbours but a gentleman by the grace of God and the cumulative virtue of heredity, was entertaining, as a visitor, the man called Archer. The visitor—a tall dark man with heavy eyebrows and a shifty eye—was seated at a table in the library of the old plantation-house with a wine-glass at his elbow, while his host faced him from half-way across the room. In the face of the latter there was something unusual—something of constraint and reserve, something—almost—of positive pain, and his guest, though cool and inscrutable, seemed solicitously sympathetic. Few people came to the Mayson house nowadays, and few visits were made therefrom, but a week before, the Colonel, taking Billy and

Abram with him, had journeyed to Keowee and had called on this man, being closeted with him while Abram did business with a melon and bowed, incidentally, to a goat. So to-day Archer had come to the "Mayson place," for the Colonel had business with him and the Colonel's business seemed to Archer desirable.

The conversation had come to a pause, and Archer toyed with the stem of his glass. After a time he spoke:

"Well, Colonel, how about our business?"

"I have thought of it," answered the Colonel. "You are quite right, sir, in what you remarked last week. The loan is a large one and the time asked is long. I think, however, that your clients—a widow, you say, and her children—will be amply protected. You have seen the place, sir?"

"Yes. It is entirely satisfactory to us."

"It is a historic plantation, and once it was a fine one. Why, sir, there has been a time when the open note of a Mayson, or even his unwitnessed word, was throughout the Keowee country considered a sufficient security for almost any sum, but——"

The old man checked himself and his face mantled in sudden shame. To this it had come that he, a Mayson, who had no need to boast, was babbling of bygone things to a mere stranger—to a man who let money for hire. Surely, with his many years, childishness had come upon him, and garrulity. He drew himself up proudly, looking thin and straight and old in his loose white linen suit.

"You may draw the mortgage, sir," he continued, "and when you are ready I will sign it."

Then, as the other complied with his suggestion, the hasty scratching sound of the pen alone breaking



In Which Hooks Are Baited 17

the silence of the room, the old man turned away to a window and stood gazing out over the roads and the fields. It was hard, he thought, that after a lifetime of plenty he should be forced in his age to pledge for money the ancestral home of the proud old Mayson line, a people who held to their lands as they held to their honour, and who yielded up neither save with death. Surely it was hard, yet the boy—the heir—must be given his opportunity. On that long red slope at Gettysburg, upholding the banner of his State and the traditions of his people, his own son had died, bravely as became a Mayson, bravely as a Mayson would have had him die. Now, on this child, the son of his son, rested the future of the race.

Manifestly the child was rapidly growing older; soon he would be too nearly a man for a further continuance of his mother's gentle rule. He must go to the schools, incidentally to get what books and instructors could give him, primarily to learn his own strength, to be thrown back upon his own resources, to come to know men and to lead them, as the Maysons had always done. For this purpose money was necessary.

But he did not mean, he told himself, to part the lad from his inheritance. No; he would economise—he and the mother of the boy—so that in time he could pay this mortgage-debt even to the uttermost farthing. A Mayson without the land—who did not live upon the land and love it—would be really no Mayson at all. But it was unthinkable that the lad should not be proud of the old plantation just as his grandfather was; and in the coming years, it seemed to the Colonel, the old house would echo to the voices of children, and the Negroes would be

singing in the crops and the cattle be grazing on the hills, and life would be a pleasant thing on the broad old Mayson place.

The old man's eyes lighted up in unison with his thoughts and his chest expanded; then he sighed. He would be dead then; it well might be that he would never know this good time that was coming. His spirits fell a little and he remembered the mortgage. After all, he was old and he was very tired. Yes, it would be good to lie down on the green hillside yonder, with his son and his wife at his side, and rest—yea, rest, on and on through the centuries, close-wrapped in the good red Mayson soil.

"The papers are ready, Colonel——" The obsequious voice of the other man aroused him from his reverie and the words jarred upon him and irritated him. But with an effort he steadied himself; the business must be concluded, of course.

"I thank you, sir," he said. "I will execute them at once." And when his daughter-in-law and one of the servants had come to witness, he stooped and affixed his signature.

Archer raised his brows and smiled until his white teeth shone.

"I will send the cheque to-morrow," he said.

Then the old man arose.

"It is late," he remarked. "You have rather a long ride ahead of you. Won't you stay to dinner?"

It was the simple, kindly formula of the house, but to the money-lender it seemed a kind of dismissal and in his heart he resented it. These people—these so-called aristocrats—were all alike. They pushed him from them and flouted him. But they should pay him for that some day. Once before in his life—— But no matter about that now. It was

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sufficient that he was no weakling—that he could compass his purposes and keep his own secrets safe.

Outwardly he was bowing low to the lady.

"I have much business," he apologised, "and have little time."

They walked out slowly upon the columned porch, and the old man thanked him simply for the trouble he had taken.

"It is nothing, I assure you, Colonel," he replied.

"It is a pleasure to serve you. Would that I had money of my own; then my friends would not need to give mortgages."

The planter replied a little abruptly. There was a false note in the money-lender's tones and he had detected it.

"I thank you, sir," he answered. Then he turned to a servant, "Cæsar," he commanded, "bring Mr. Archer his horse."

He was quite a simple-minded old man, and he detested a hypocrite.

But the other man, riding away, looked back at the fields and at the stately house, and he was satisfied, for he had done a good business that day.

CHAPTER III

THE "CUNJER BAG"

THE drowsy afternoon had come; the breeze had long since died; and the leaves of the trees hung limp and motionless. Away in the western sky huge thunderheads had piled themselves heap on heap and their white fronts gleamed in the sunlight like mountain masses shrouded in drifted snow. Beneath the bases of the clouds was stretched a faint outline of the forest-clad hills, dimmed and etherealised by the magic effects of distance, while above their mighty pinnacles was the transparent blue of the infinite sky.

But nearer to hand than the clouds or the hills lay the deserted fields of the Mayson place. All silent they were save one alone, in which a single plowman called to his plodding beast, intensifying by his solitary voice the sense of utter loneliness.

"Haw! Whoa haw!" The drawling words drifted across the newly made furrows and lost themselves in echoes among the unkempt and tangled hedgerows; the tired mule did not quicken its pace; even the watchful crows failed to raise their heads or to listen. It was afternoon, the busy, bustling world was far away, and Nature was somnolent.

Down at the pool above the "big road," where the fertile "bottoms" of the Mayson place border

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on those of the Chambliss farm, Abram and Billy still lingered. For one short hour during the morning "luck" had been with them, and that was glory enough for the day, so when it had "turned"—caused, Abram said, by Billy's carelessness in stepping over a fishing-pole—they had eaten their lunch and had laid themselves down again. Now they dozed in peace as becomes those who have accomplished things, while the long shadows crept out across the stream and barred the surface of the gliding water. Behind them, where the hillsides met the level "bottoms" and the seep-water from hidden springs made strips of marshy ground, the "snake-doctors," as the Negroes call the needle-like dragon-flies, hovered with quivering motion above the green and stagnant puddles or darted like strips of flying metal through the soft and slanting light. Presently, from some hiding-place in the thicketty waterside, a tree-frog weary of the silence voiced insistently its raucous cry for rain.

The harsh, metallic rasping of the frog disturbed the Negro, so that he moved, rubbed his heavy eyes and sat up. Perceiving the cause of his awakening, he gave it his attention.

"Rain! Rain! Rain!" he mocked, swaying his body and nodding. "Ain't you never ti'uhed o' rain? Hit jes' rained yistiddy—what fur yer kaint shut up?"

In his disgust he rose to his feet and threw at the frog, causing thereby a crash in the underbrush. In frightened astonishment the frog for a moment ceased its cry. Then it shifted its position and again petitioned for rain. The Negro sat down and spoke derogatorily of its voice.

Suddenly, however, he rose again and looked

about him, searching in the grass and peering into the stream.

"Whar dat turkle?" he asked. "How come my turkle ain't yere? Billy, is you moved my turkle?"

Getting no answer, he made further speech, detailing the turtle's shortcomings, for it was very evident that during its captor's nap the turtle had crawled away. This was, indeed, a loss, for Abram believes to this day that a "turkle" is composed of flesh of many kinds, and of every kind the best—chicken and pork and 'possum, all the flavours are there; moreover, of the shell Mammy Clairsy was accustomed to make soup. And in thinking of all this Abram's temper rose and he sought an object for his wrath.

"Billy!" he called out, "Billy, I b'lieve you turned my turkle loose!"

But Billy did not heed the groundless charge. Instead, he lay upon the grass, shading his eyes from the sun with his battered straw hat and gazing into the sky. High above him—so high that it seemed a mere speck on the burnished buckler of the heavens—a great gray hen-hawk circled and soared. Billy watched the bird musingly. Why did it fly so high, he wondered, and could it fly even higher if it wished? He measured the distance with his eye, comparing it with the height of the tallest trees. The result made him shrink. Could heaven itself be so very much farther away?

What a wonderful place, however, must that heaven be which his mother had described to him. Could the hawk from its far point of vantage see the golden streets and the shining palaces and the angels? Heaven? Why did his mother talk so much about it? It was a good place, he knew, and he knew also that he ought to wish to go there, but



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somehow he didn't wish it—that is, not just yet. He shuddered at his own great wickedness. Yet, though it was pleasant up there, the good brown earth was pleasant, too—the shady woods, and the streams, and the red hills of the Mayson place. Besides, to inhabit the earth one did not have to die; one had only to be born.

Birth and death—the beginning and the end of things. The great mystery of being came upon the lad and troubled him.

But the hawk still hung there, flying always in widening circles and mounting higher and higher, and the vault of the sky seemed to widen and to deepen, and the voice of the distant plowman fell soothingly on the ear.

"Haw! Whoa haw!" The eyelids under the hat drooped gently, the hands fell lax, and Billy was fast asleep.

"Get up f'um dar, Billy! Git up f'um dar!"

Abram stood afar off and pelted the sleeper with little clods of hardened clay. The boy grasped a stick and threw it accurately, hitting the Negro upon the shin. Then he sprang up hurriedly, thus dodging the return of the missile. But it was too hot for much horseplay, so presently the warfare subsided. Afterward they inspected their catch, and paddled their bare feet in the cool water, and watched the dragon-flies; but the time came at last when all of this palled.

"Le's go home," suggested Billy, wrestling in the meanwhile with a mighty yawn.

Abram assented to this, but it cost him an evident effort, for in his mind there were visions of an unweeded garden and an angry black woman with a very heavy hand.

"We-alls ain't in any hurry, dough, is we, Billy?" he remarked so insinuatingly that Billy's heart smote him and, out of consideration for Abram's feelings, he took the longer road, which led him across the creek and up by the Chambliss house. There is an orchard by the Chambliss house where June apples grow, and rusticoats.

The boys loitered when they reached the orchard fence and regarded the apples. They felt very virtuous concerning them because June apple time was past, and the rusticoats were not yet ripe. But as they turned their backs upon temptation a white sunbonnet bobbed up on the farther side of the low rail fence and a piping voice called:

"Billy Mayson! O-o-h-h Billy May-son!"

"Here!" answered Billy gleefully. "Jus' come here, Annie."

In response to his invitation, a little maid, trim of figure and dainty of foot, climbed into sight.

"Oh, you've got f-i-i-sh!" she cried. "Billy, I want a fish—a teeny little fish!"

The lad disengaged a minnow from his string and put it in her hands.

"Oh! oh! oh!" she screamed in shuddering delight, "it's wriggledy!"

The boy was cutting her a twig on which she might "string" her new possession, when a fat black woman appeared and drove him away in disgrace.

"Kain't keep dis chile clean," she grumbled, "an' all 'long o' you. Las' week you painted her wid pokeberries playin' you wuz Injuns, an' dis week you'se a-mussin' her up wid feesh. I'se a good mine ter tell yo' granpaw."

The boy turned to go, but the child called after him:



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"I like you, Billy," she said; "I jus' think you're good."

He stopped, half minded to go back, and then a sudden shyness came over him and he turned again and ran. There came a time in after years when he would have given much to hear that voice calling, "I like you, Billy! I jus' think you're good."

Now, however, he ran, and called after Abram: "Wait, Abram, wait. I'm coming," and as he hurried along, looking backward over his shoulder, he suddenly landed plumply in another negress's arms.

For Abram's sudden flight had not been without cause. He had seen, even if Billy had not, the approach of the second woman, and had forthwith taken to his heels.

"Witch Nancy," he muttered to himself, "Witch Nancy," a very real fear speeding his pattering feet. What mattered it to Abram that this was Billy's foster-mother, that Witch Nancy had kept Billy and had nourished him during the long months that Billy's own mother was prostrate because of her husband's death. It was possible—barely possible—that witches couldn't hurt white folks; but as for Negroes, there wasn't the slightest doubt of an "obi" woman's power over them. What kept Unk' William Sias lame so long? Who set a "scorripin" to gnawing in Mary Ann Isom's stomach? Who kept, in a dark old "chist" in her cabin, down by the pines, strange herbs, the claws of four-footed beasts, the cast skins of snakes and of toads, and the clean dry bones of a dead man's hand? Witch Nancy, most certainly. Why, it was "bad luck" even to have her look at one!

And—Abram slackened his pace and shivered, now that he remembered it—her deep, disquieting, mysterious eyes had rested on him even as he passed. Impressed with his danger, he stopped, made a "cross mark" in the dust of the road, and spat in it. It was not yet too late, perhaps, to avert the evil—at any rate, the mystic charm could do no harm.

Having done what he could toward the putting aside of calamity, he ran on, for Mammy Clairisy's wrath was a little thing when compared to his horror of a witch-woman's eyes.

In the meantime Billy was disengaging himself from his captor's embrace.

"Why, Mammy Nancy," he remarked, apologetically, "I didn't go to jostle you. I didn't see where I was going."

Witch Nancy did not answer, but putting him aside, she shook a bony finger warningly at his late antagonist.

"You know dis boy?" she queried sternly. "You know who suckle 'im? How come you sass 'im, nigger 'oman? How come dat, I ax?"

The other Negress was departing. Now, however, she turned in nervous haste to defend herself.

"I ain't sass 'im, Aint Nancy. I wuz jes' a-funnin' wid 'im." She spread out her hands deprecatingly and anxiously watched the expression of the other's face.

But the witch-woman refused to be placated.

"Dis my chile," she continued. "You sass him, you sass me!"

"Oh, it's all right, Mammy Nancy," interposed Billy; "I can take care of myself. Julie Ann was jus' makin' out anyhow. Say, aren't your blue plums ripe yet?"

The woman, ceasing her tirade, looked down upon him, and a tender light shone in the depths of her eyes. Never a child had been hers save one, and that one had died a month from the day of its birth. People did not call her a witch-woman in those days, for then she was tall and lithe and comely, and she was a capable woman, sure of herself and trusted by her mistress. Therefore, since her own child was dead, and because her mistress, nigh also to death, could not nurse Billy nor by any means satisfy his small but insistent appetite, they had brought him to her and had put him into her arms.

So his white baby fingers had learned to fondle her coal-black cheeks and his little head had nestled upon her bosom, and because her heart was an hungered she had taken him to it and had loved him. He was not hers by birth, but she had been the first mother that ever he had known. She exulted when she thought of it. How good it was, in the loneliness of her cabin, when the dark nights had come and the wind crooned in the boughs of the pines, to remember those other nights which she had given to him—the simple cradle-songs with which she had hushed him to slumber. He was her boy, the dearer, perhaps, because her right to him was open to question. But she had a right, for even the child's own mother had admitted the claim, and had taught him to say "Mammy Nancy."

She was a strange, impulsive woman, loving and hating with a fierceness that was all her own. Little by little, since the days of Billy's babyhood, the Negroes had come to fear her, and at last they had named her a Witch. It had suited her to foster the idea. In time she herself even came to believe in it—that is, in part. Somewhere lurking in the

depths of her nature there was something of mysticism, something of the love of dominion and of power. Who can say whence it came? There were chiefs in the far-removed African tribes—chiefs and prophets. Is it that only white men inherit? Nay, verily. And now she was a witch—she accepted the epithet—let all the people beware.

As for the boy, sometimes he laughed at her pretensions, sometimes he half believed in them; but at all times, second only to his real mother and his grandfather, he loved her, and he was proud that his "mammy" was an "obi-woman," since it added to his importance among the Negroes. To be sure, he was high in their regard already. Was he not the "young marster" to whom the land would fall?

But as the witch-woman's nursling he approached them from another side. Very religious these Southern Negroes are, going to church on Sundays and joining in prayer and praise; but on other days, even as they chant their revival songs, their rude, uncultured minds evoke vague memories, and recall the whispered traditions that have come to them from their fathers. So when evening falls and the weird shadows flit through the woodlands, and the "Jack-o'-mer-lantern" burns, and the screech-owl voices its eerie cry, it does not seem strange to these that the old devil-gods of their ancestors stalk through the land, hand in hand with the Christian faith. It is not in a day nor in a year that a race-religion is blotted out utterly.

"Plums? Co'se dey is ripe. Jes' come erlong wid me."

Leaving the Chambliss place behind, they traversed the winding length of the high road, crossing



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the creek again, and climbing the hill until they came to a worn but narrow path which diverged into the growing crops. Turning aside into this, they reached, after farther journeying, the door of Nancy's cabin, which stood at the edge of the fields.

It was a typical Negro hut. Back of it was a little garden where vegetables grew; at the foot of the garden was a spring, and beyond the spring were the pine woods bordered by thickets. As the two approached, a yellow cat came to meet them, rubbing against Billy's legs and purring; a lean cur stretched himself lazily and wagged his stump of tail, and a speckled hen clucked importantly to her brood of downy chicks. The door opened to a push—no one cared to disturb aught that belonged to Witch Nancy.

"Come in, sonny. Ain't yer hongry? I got some nice chicken yere."

But the boy preferred the plums, and busied himself at the laden trees that were ranged along the garden fence.

Inside the cabin Witch Nancy opened her "chist" and began fumbling about therein. Here was a worn little shoe—a relic of Billy's babyhood, bunches of sage, and catnip, and "fireweed," odds and ends of string, and bright-coloured bits of calico. And beneath all this there were bags and little boxes tied up and packed away. From somewhere amid the rubbish she brought out a needle and thread and a scrap of dark-green cloth.

"Trouble!" she muttered to herself. "Trouble comin' ter de Mayson place! Trouble done sowed een de Mayson lan'!"

Still talking, she fashioned with nimble fingers

a tiny sack, and in it she placed ashes and salt and red earth powdered fine. As she worked, her eyes began to glitter. Warm though it was, she lit a small fire on the hearth and she brought a vessel of water. Over fire and water she waved the sack, for she was making a "cunjer bag."

Later, when the boy came in to bid her good-by, she bound the bag about his neck, charging him to speak of it to no one.

"Hit's fer luck, sonny," she explained. "Hit's ter keep all de trouble off. Don't you let nobody tetch hit—not eb'n yer maw. Ef yer do, den de trouble gwine ter come."

As he departed she watched him longingly.

"He's mine!" she ejaculated fiercely, "mine!" Then she began to moan, swaying herself to and fro. "Trouble!" she wailed softly, "trouble comin' ter de Mayson place! Trouble done sowed een de Mayson lan'!"

That night as he lay asleep in his bed, Billy's mother—a woman white and frail and with the deep lines of sorrow graven into her face—bent above him and kissed him, and as she did so she saw the "cunjer bag."

"Some of Nancy's foolishness," she murmured, and bringing her scissors she clipped the string that held it.

The boy threw out his arm and groaned; the woman patted his hot tanned cheek and kissed him again. Then she turned and threw the "cunjer bag" out at the window. By morning the lad had forgotten it.

CHAPTER IV

THE MONEY-LENDER OF KEOWEE

KEOWEE is not a "court-house town"—that honour is reserved to Bellville, which is ten miles farther to the west. But Keowee has a railway and a post-office and many traditions; therefore it is content. Carping critics have charged that as a whole Keowee is lazy, that it lacks initiative; also that it is sparing in continuity of effort. But these are mere assertions; nothing is proven as yet. It may be that Keowee is courageous, that it fears no vague to-morrow, and that, having a capacity for rest, it chooses to exercise its gift. Certainly, in the long summer days, when the thermometer stands in the nineties and the dusty streets shimmer in the heat, there is no more quiet town.

In such placid times the inhabitants of the village sit listlessly in the shade waiting until "sundown" comes, and it is in the cool of the evening only that they bestir themselves to pay visits, to walk abroad, or to loiter in their gardens. As for business—at this season there is none. The crops even are all "laid by," and the Negroes, over in that portion of the town which has been preëmpted by them, sit in the brooding shadows and thump decrepit banjos and sing:

"Oh! hit ain't no use o' nigger wukkin' so hahd,
Gotter 'oman cookin' een de white man yahd,
Mos' ever' night 'bout half pas' eight,
Ketch er nigger loafin' roun' de white man gate."

That is, the Negro men sing this, but the tired women coming home from their labours, "een de white man yahd," answer in lilting voices:

"Come back, come back, my own true love,
What make yer do me so-o-o,
I got yer meat, I got yer bread,
An' I got yer 'lasses to-o-o."

Then the evening breeze begins to blow, and the stars come out, and presently there is silence. Thus the night grows old in quaint, slow-going Keowee.

But although it is a peculiar town and is not by any means open to innovations, yet the inhabitants thereof are very human. If a stranger appears among them, they wish to know whence he comes and why. They are not surprised, however, if he lingers, for to them Keowee seems the best spot on earth in which a man may live; and the men who have grown old watching the harvest times come and go in the broad fields round about, have a saying that if a person but once tastes the sparkling water from the old curbed well on the "square," then a spell is laid upon him so that ere he dies he must perforce come back to it again—that though for a time he may forget, yet in the end the low, old-fashioned houses, the roadside tangles of wild rose and honeysuckles, and the long blue stretches of the hills now alight with the smile of the Southern sun, now wet with the tears of the Southern rain, will have their way with him, and will draw him unto themselves.

It is by no means certain, but it may be that this was why John Archer came to the out-of-the-way little town—that some time in his journeyings he had passed this way, and, being weary, had stopped



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to linger awhile under the oak trees and to rest, and that when he had slaked his thirst he wandered on and was forgotten. This is, at least, the explanation which the curious in Keowee found themselves forced to give, for even after much inquiring, so far as they could tell, the man's life might have begun when, on a July day in 1865, the east-bound train had left him, without explanation, a stranger in their streets.

Immediately upon his arrival, since he was a silent man and exchanged no confidences, the village gossips and the loafers on the street corners busied themselves concerning him, spending much time in vain surmisings as to his antecedents and his business; and when, after all their labour, no hint of either was forthcoming, they resented his reticence, and remarked among themselves that very probably the newcomer was no great deal better than he should be. In fact, all the elements of a petty persecution were slowly brought to hand.

But, paradoxical though it appears, the power of passiveness is wonderful. It is seldom that a man is beaten overmuch if he refuses to strike in return. Had Archer resented the oblique looks that were given him, or noticed the idle rumours that were set afloat, then the spirit of meddling would have had that upon which to feed; but as he did not, by degrees the interest in him waned and he was left to his own devices. Then after a year had elapsed and he had come to be no longer a stranger, but one among the men of the town, he opened an office, and later announced that he represented those who had money to let, but that the collateral must be good, to be sure.

So whether he willed it or not, Archer became in

some sort a blessing to the community and a public benefactor, for times were hard in Keowee in those days of '66. Under the old conditions there had been money in the South, and to spare; but under the new, with the war-cloud scarce yet rolled away, with the planters "land poor" and penniless, with the Negroes freed and demoralised, with credit lacking utterly, and all the machinery of commerce awry, the outlook was depressing. Yet the land was there, open to the plow, and fertile; the Negroes were still capable of labour; and all the crude material of business was at hand. There was lacking only the present dollar—the magic key that would unlock the granaries of the soil and bid the people eat and be full. This key Archer supplied—for a consideration—and it was no small thing in that day of unsettled and erratic values to find a man who still had faith in the good red fields, and who was able as well as willing to prove his faith by his works—to advance the ready cash wherewith to purchase the cattle, the tools, and the other supplies that were essential to effective labour.

But Archer was such a man. Though only acting for others, as he always assured his clients, he placed his loans judiciously, and the results were good both for Archer and for Keowee. All this served to establish for him a certain position among the people. Moreover, he gave liberally to the churches and to all public enterprises, bewailing himself the while that his poverty precluded his giving more. By such means he gathered to himself esteem while financially he prospered.

Nor, with all its faults and his, was Keowee ungrateful to Archer. Full well the people saw the service that he had done, and in return they granted



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him their consideration and their friendship. Occasionally he strained the latter, it is true, as when he closed down suddenly on some unfortunate mortgagee, but very quickly the murmurings were hushed. Business was business in Keowee, and if men failed to redeem their pledges that was their fault, and if the money-lender profited thereby that was good financiering. They were not used to such dealings, these old-fashioned folks—once business had been friendship with them, and they would have scorned to press a man and a neighbour in his extremity. Men did sometimes take advantage of another's dire necessity, even then, but their mothers were not proud of them for it. But those days were gone, their ideals were crushed, the customs of commerce were supplanting the customs of agriculture, the old paths of kindness had led but to defeat and want; they must learn better now. The lesson was not pleasant, but they were conning it loyally.

And from this, the standpoint of the twentieth century, it may be said that the country places of the South have learned that lesson—have mastered it after fifty years of effort to their own everlasting loss. A man may cheat you there to-day and be sure that his fellows will applaud him for his shrewdness. The sun still shines as softly, the gray fields are yet fertile and broad, the long, red roads still stretch over the western hills, and a welcome awaits one at every farmhouse door, but—business is business in Keowee now.

In '66, however, the lesson was as yet imperfect. The mercantile men recited it, but they did so haltingly. Nevertheless, they could by no means grumble when a pupil more apt than they demonstrated its full possibilities.

Yet Archer, though deserving it, sought to avoid particular credit for his ability in the handling of money. A silent man by nature, he was, after a good stroke of business, almost voluble. Was the foreclosure a simple matter of failure to pay, then it was the money of a widow or of a fatherless child that he had placed. Who could blame him for being careful lest some helpless one should suffer? But did the matter in hand seem unjust in its nature, a transaction that kept the letter while it broke the spirit of the law, then the investment was that of distant men—"hard men" who reaped what they had not sown, and who gathered where they had not strewn—and these were holding him to a very strict account. Much to his regret, they were forcing him on to unpleasant things despite his representations.

In part this deceived the people, in part it did not; but after all that might be said against him, Archer had helped the town in its day of need, and the town would not turn and rend him now. Besides, they were learning their lesson—it was admitted that Archer was "a mighty good business man."

So matters stood when Archer visited the Mayson place to conclude the mortgage on the Mayson lands. And on the warm afternoon that followed the journey in question he sat in his red-brick office on the side-street that is beyond the warehouses, and from his window he took a comprehensive view of a hitching-rack, a post-oak tree bearing a tin tobacco sign, and a plank fence papered with out-of-date circus advertisements. It was quite a dull little side-street, and the objects upon it were not conducive to mental elevation. Nevertheless, it was with a satisfied glance that Mr. Archer read for



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the hundredth time of the peculiar virtues of "Rich and Waxy" as a chew, and became aware of the now faded "ninety-nine stripes" of the "Royal Bengal Tiger."

For although the village could not divine his past, John Archer had a clear and distinct recollection of at least a very large part of the same. It was the contrast that made him smile. The gentle slopes recalled more rugged heights, and the warm sunlight a time when it had been cold.

How vividly he remembered it all—the cabin on the side of the snow-covered mountain; the peddler's wagon creeping along the frozen road; the dark, evil-browed man in the cabin door, and the bleary-eyed drunken woman. They had beaten him that morning, and he had crept away out into the cold and the snow, where, clad in one threadbare garment, he had shivered and sobbed in his misery. He remembered, too, his resolve—he would kill those two, the man and the woman, as soon as ever he was grown. Some night when they slept he would arise and go out softly, and then he would creep in again and would strike them surely—so!—and so! He remembered the very billet of wood that he had chosen. It was a persimmon stick, and it was heavy. The futility of his childish anger now seemed to him pathetic. He felt sorry that he had not avenged himself. After all the years his hatred smouldered in him still.

But although his own hand had been too feeble to hasten it, still a very speedy punishment had overtaken the precious pair, for in two days men had come searching for the peddler. The wagon was never found, but far down in a neighbouring ravine a mangled body drew vultures first, and

afterward men; and about the cabin goods were brought to light—goods such as the pedler had carried. Then they had taken both man and woman away, and he had never seen them any more.

Next he remembered a great, barn-like, desolate house. Save for himself and one other boy, there were in that house only aged people and idiots. How those white heads moaned and swayed themselves to and fro, and told each other stories of the times when they had been of some importance in the world; and how the idiots grinned and cracked their fingers, and stared—he had been afraid of them.

But one day when, according to his custom, the other boy had beaten him—Archer was glad still that the boy had since had reason to regret that custom—and he was weeping, and the grinning idiots were pointing at him, a woman saw him and was moved to compassion and took him away. That woman wore pretty clothes and rode in a carriage, and her touch seemed very soft to one accustomed only to blows.

At thought of her Archer turned from the window quickly and tried to check the current of his thoughts. He did not wish to think of that woman—least of all to-day, when he was pleased with himself and was recounting his successes.

For there were other lads in the house where she had taken him—her sons, who had looked contemptuously upon him because, forsooth, he was accustomed to meet insults after another manner than their own. Fools they were who did not know how to wait—who could not bide an opportune time when a blow might be dealt surely and in

perfect safety. So they had contemned him and had called him a coward.

Even the memory of the epithet stung him so that he bared his teeth and drew in his breath with a snarl. Coward, was he, who would not strike? Well, they had found out about that, perhaps!

There was the girl, too—the younger woman who had laughed at him and who had mocked his love when he would have spoken to her tenderly. Faugh! How she had fawned upon that young cockerel, his foster-brother, and how that one had strutted before her in his brass buttons and his military coat. That had been enough for him—he had left them then. And he had made his way, too, in spite of them, and had given them cause to remember him.

But the woman who had reared him—had she no children he could have worshipped her; and as he thought of how his vengeance must have seemed to her a kind of repentance came upon him. He had not meant to hurt her, not even through others, but that devil Opportunity had come when his anger was hot upon him and when he was reckless. Yes, he made a false step that time, and one has always to pay dearly for those. And he had but clumsily ended the affair, too. A face arose before him—a writhing face with rigid, burning eyes—and he shuddered. What if——? The thought unnerved him. His face blanched, and he caught at his desk for support.

Then he steadied himself. What a fool he was, to be sure, to let the ghosts he had conjured creep upon him unawares and frighten him. It was impossible, of course, that trouble of that sort should come to him now. Those bygone things had been put away—had been cast from him as one

casts off a worn-out garment—and he had come here to live his life and be at peace. Power was his now, and influence, and after a season goodly lands might also be his. When that time came he would take possession of his new estate, and life, for him, would be full of ease and pleasantness. He had determined on this long ago.

The sun went down behind the western hills, lighting the tiny clouldlets in the sky until they shone like golden ships upon a silver sea; then the twilight came and the darkness, and the Negroes began to sing their good-night songs; but he noticed none of this, for his mind was full of visions of things as they were to be. Yes, lands would be his—broad lands open to the sun, and fertile. These broken people who affected to disdain him, what did he care for them? They should even assist him in attaining his ends: he could not say just how, but it would come about so; he felt very sure that it would. Why, even now half the countryside were ready to truckle at his feet! And when it was all accomplished he would rest, and perhaps he would found a family. Ah, he had thought of that, too, before. He had pictured it all, and that girl had spoiled it. In his heart he felt that she had spoiled it forever.

And as he sat watching the stars the full moon rose round and red, and though there was before him but the street and the dead plank wall beyond, an odour of roses swept into his nostrils, and he saw before his eyes a garden and a girl—a garden whose opening blossoms caught the moonlight in their chalices, and a girl in her lissom beauty laughing his love to scorn.

The sight enraged him. He leaped to his feet, a

curse formed on his lips, and his face was convulsed with passion. Would that she were hungry to-night, that her garments hung from her in tatters, that the bare road furnished her a sleeping-place, and that he, knowing this, could tell her that he knew it. Where now was that husband whom she had chosen? And why did he delay his homecoming? Archer laughed. These aristocrats—how he hated them; these people who were so much too good to mate with the common herd!

Gradually he calmed himself and his thought reverted to that elder woman. He thought that he would be glad to know that his foster-mother was well, that she had no need, that she had forgotten and was happy. And if he but dared he would go back there and—— But no, that would never do! Once he had heard from one who little knew to whom the tale was being told, how back there in old Kentucky and in the wood-hidden Tennessee country the people had not forgotten.

Tiring of his thoughts at last, Archer rose and closed his office and went away, his tall, dark figure looming large in the moonlit street, and as he walked he looked about him furtively and started at every sudden sound. But away to the west, beyond the hazy slopes of the far-off mountains and among the green clover-fields that cover the rounded hills, the girl and the woman lay very still in the midst of their old rose garden. The thin, clear light cast shadows across their couches, the rose leaves fell softly upon their coverlets, the spiders wove them curtains of diaphanous gauze, and the dew-fall set their furnishings with jewels. It was a quiet spot, no one at all came to disturb them there, so their slumbers were long and deep.

CHAPTER V

THE TRAPPING OF JASON SIMPKINS

It was three full days before Billy Mayson remembered Witch Nancy's "cunjer bag," but when troubles began to accumulate he thought of it and lo! it was gone. He felt that he understood then why it was that his grandfather was losing corn steadily from the big crib at the end of the lane, and why he himself would be sent away next year out of his own little niche in the world to take part in the larger but less attractive experiences of a school. He was ashamed for his mother or his grandfather to know how much he dreaded this new place of which they had been telling him, and because he had lost her gift he was more ashamed to meet Mammy Nancy. Therefore, when he had exhausted Abram's capacity for sympathy, he went across the road to the overseer's house to consult with his friend, Mrs. Binns.

Mrs. Binns was a fat woman and good-natured withal. Sometimes she went about knitting, with her ball of cotton thread stuck fast beside her capacious apron-strings, and when she was not knitting she was roasting, or baking, or frying crisp, brown doughnuts. Once, when she was not Mrs. Binns, but was Mrs. "Sullivan" instead, she had been the wife of the last "overseer" who had managed the Mayson place. Then the trouble had come—"the rich man's war an' the po' man's fight," as Mrs.



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Binns privately termed it, and poor Sullivan, who had never owned a Negro in his life, had marched away because others did, and had died fighting sturdily for principles of which he was absolutely ignorant. Afterward, his widow had consoled herself by marrying Long Jerry Binns; and Colonel Mayson, allowing them to retain possession of the now unnecessary overseer's house, had rented Long Jerry a pasture and some patches of hillside land. One child had Mrs. Binns up to this time—Luke Sullivan in reality, Luke Binns, however, in the inaccurate language of a country neighbourhood. Later in life the Fates brought her, also, a daughter.

But Billy Mayson knew nothing of the departed Sullivan, since no one had troubled to enlighten him, and to his mind Luke Binns was the embodiment of woodcraft and the repository of all knowledge concerning the streams and the fields. For it was Luke who, from the vantage point of three additional years, had taught Billy to swim, and who had instructed him in the sundry principles pertaining to the trapping of birds. Also Luke, at times, was accustomed to take the boy rabbit-hunting; and when the cool mornings had come and the frost with its kisses had set all the hedgerows blushing, they whooped themselves hoarse as they followed a yelping pack made up in its entirety of three lean, mangy curs and a noisy bobtailed fice. But the boys saw no defect in their dogs. To them the shrill baying of the curs was as pleasant as music in their ears, and the pattering gait of the "black-and-tan" fice seemed as swift as that of a blooded hound. And always, when they returned from the hunt, Mrs. Binns was ready for them with good things, with doughnuts hot from the pan or potatoes roasted in the ashes.

It was remarkable, thought Billy, how very good Mrs. Binns's potatoes were—how very much better than those at his grandfather's house.

But Mammy Nancy was prejudiced against Mrs. Binns. The Negro in the South has ever looked down upon the "poor white" class, and the "poor white" has replied to this contempt with blows and with infinite hatred; hence "race wars" and other complications. And Witch Nancy had this feeling which was common to her people.

"Sonny," she had said to Billy once, after she had recalled him from the overseer's house, "Sonny, you stay 'way f'um dar. Dem folks ain't yo' kine. Dem folks is trash—dat's what dey is. You stay 'way f'um dem."

And strange to say, Billy's mother shared, to some extent, old Nancy's prejudices.

"I don't much like it, Billy," she would remark to him; "don't go there *much*, little son." Yet she did not object in the least to his fellowship with Abram.

But to-day, since Abram had failed him, Billy had gone to the overseer's house.

"They're goin' to send me off, Mrs. Binns," he remarked, as his friend raised her eyes from her knitting to make him a kindly welcome. "They're goin' to send me to Charleston—to a school." It seemed to him that Mrs. Binns would see at once how little desirable it was that he should go away.

But to Mrs. Binns's mind Charleston was a wonderful place. It was a long way off, of course, but there was an ocean there—an ocean that was even larger than the Keowee mill-pond—and there were lights on the streets that burned all night, and whole rows



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of "tremenjus big houses" she had "hearn tell." She thought therefore that Billy was rejoicing.

"Whoo-ee," she ejaculated, "that's fine! Hit shore air mighty fine. Luke! Luke, come here! Did you know, now, that Billy was a-gwine off?"

Luke shambled loose-jointedly around the corner of the house, his shock of sandy hair almost hiding his pale, watery, blue eyes. Before him were the cur dogs, and the fice was tagging at his heels.

"When air yer goin', Billy?" he asked with interest.

"Ne—nex' year," answered Billy hesitatingly, for Mrs. Binns's view of the matter had bewildered him. How could it be a fine thing to leave the Mayson place, or the rabbit-hunting, or the fishing? "Not till nex' year," he repeated.

"Oh," replied Luke, vastly more relieved than he would have acknowledged; "that's all right then. Nex' year's a long time off. Le's me an' you go an' finish them thar rabbit traps what we started las' week."

But as they went away Luke's remarks were less reassuring. "Gwine ter school, hey?" he continued. "I'se hearn tell 'at they whups 'em thar—jes' bucks 'em down an' whups 'em same as a nigger is whapped."

It was but the careless speech of a vagrant lad—some random recollection of the idle tales that scatter themselves here and there—but it lodged in the brain of the younger boy and expanded, his fertile imagination filling in the details of the picture as he worked on in silence at the rabbit traps.

They flogged boys there—flogged them like "niggers"—and they would flog him, Billy Mayson, like he was a "nigger." He could not get rid of the thought. Did his grandfather know all this, he

wondered, and would he still send him off if he knew? The boy half believed that the old man would, for he thought his grandfather a very stern man—a man whom prejudices could not sway, and one who believed probably that floggings should be duly administered. Justice he would seek with confidence at John Mayson's hands, but mercy, never. And these were opinions that he shared with no one. He was a Mayson himself, and he was loyal.

But the boy's faith in his mother never wavered, and in his heart he absolved her from any knowledge of the real character of those schools. To most boys a flogging is as nothing, but Billy Mayson had never had a stroke in his life. To him it seemed that utter degradation lay in bodily punishment, and that to bear the rod might be harder than the facing of death. Yet he set his small jaw hard—if it pleased his mother, that mother who now was ill so often and who was growing so pale and so weak, then he would go, and they might even flog him for her sake.

But Billy did not wear his heart on his sleeve, and to prevent Luke from suspecting the turmoil that was in his mind he spoke of the crib in the lane, and of the corn that had been taken therefrom; and in this Luke was interested greatly.

"Some nigger," he replied decisively, "some nigger a stealin' of the co'n. All of 'em does it ef they gits any chanst."

And afterward he began to hum:

"Some folks say 'at nigger won't steal,
But I cotch one in my co'nfiel'."

repeating the words over and over again.

But Billy's mind was too full of other things to



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take a great interest in rabbit traps, so presently he laid his hammer aside and recrossed the road and came to the pilfered crib. He sat down before this and considered. Perhaps if he should catch the thief his grandfather might think him too valuable a lad to send away. There was a hole between the logs large enough to admit the hand of a man, and this was worn very smooth. Beside the hole were scattered the white and the yellow grains that had fallen to the ground as the ears were drawn outside. An idea struck the lad.

"The very thing," he exclaimed, "surely the very thing."

Quickly he ran to the house and brought a key; then he searched a weedy fence-corner and presently brought to light a rusty and wornout muskrat trap that Abram had hidden there. This he took into the crib, and he "set" it just beside the open place so that a groping hand might easily find it. Then, having chained the trap to a sill, he retired without to reflect, and so rapt was he in his thoughts that he did not see Witch Nancy watching him from across the fence.

But in a little while she came to him and spoke:

"Dat's what white trash does," she said, pointing at the hole in the crib—"white trash lak Long Jerry Binns, an' lak Luke Binns, an' lak dat fat 'oman over dar."

It was clear then to Billy that she had seen whence he had originally come and that she wished to rebuke him. A moment before he had been dejected, but something in her remark amused him, and his eyes gleamed with a sudden merriment.

"White trash!" he exclaimed, in mock astonishment. "Now, Luke said it surely was a nigger."

The woman straightened herself. "Nigger!" she repeated, scornfully. "Nigger! Who is dat Luke, who talk so big 'bout nigger? I lay dat trap, ef hit's sot good, is gwinter tell yer anudder tale, ter-morrer."

"Will it catch him, do you think? Will it, Mammy Nancy?"

The boy was all excitement now. So much, to his mind, depended on the result.

"Does yer want ter ketch him, honey? Ef yer does, I jes 'bout 'specks yer kin." She went into the barn and inspected his arrangements, then she sent him away and she herself departed. But before she went she drew figures in the sand before the crib, and waved her hands, palms downward, over them.

That night, after moonrise had come and Billy was fast asleep, a ghost glided out across the Mayson place. It was a tall ghost, and it wore a yellow "headhankercher" twined about its brows, but its face was chalky white. And, as it cleared the open fields and entered the bottoms, it muttered to itself contentedly, "Nigger, wuz hit? Den hit wuz a mighty pale nigger dat I seed come dis a-way jes' las' night!"

Then it crossed the creek and skirted the Chambliss farm and went on to a rickety log house where Jason Simpkins lived—Jason Simpkins, who was own brother-in-law to Long Jerry Binns. There it stopped and hid itself, and for an hour there was no sound save the hooting of the swamp owls away down at the edge of the creek.

But as the seven stars sank in the West and the sleepy farmyard cocks called a greeting to the still small hours of the morning, the door of the log



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house opened and Jason, himself, came out and quickly moved away. Then the ghost followed him, gliding swiftly along the shadowy hedges and sheltering in the low pines and in the weedy ditches, and thus they came to the big barn that is at the end of the lane behind the Mayson house.

Here Jason went cautiously, scouting along all the fence-rows and peering down the paths, while the ghost, which after all seemed a very retiring ghost, lay under cover of a weed-hidden ditch and watched his movements with interest. Then, when he could discover no one, the man came up to the crack in the barn and, taking out a bag, thrust his hand well inside. One ear he drew out in safety, and two, but when he reached to get the third there was a click and he leaped high in his surprise, and afterward he kicked lustily, and yelled and swore. And the ghost came out of its hiding-place and mocked the man so that he was beside himself with anger and shame. Nevertheless, the ghost remained with him until morning came.

"Sonny, is yer 'wake? Say, sonny, is yer waked up yit?"

The rosy summer morning was breaking in the east, and the yellow "headhankercher" was at the outside of Billy's window. On the black face that the handkerchief shaded the gray marks of the chalk were still plainly visible.

"Git up, sonny; you'se cotch him. Dat's what yer sho'ly has!"

Billy rose in trembling haste and hurried himself into his clothes, then he dropped out at the window, and at the end of the lane he found the man with his arm fast in the crib.

"You raskil!" panted the furious thief. "You cussid little raskil! You set this trap here, cuss yer."

At his oath, Witch Nancy's eyes flashed dangerously.

"Shut up!" she exclaimed. "Ole marster'll 'bout whup yer when he finds yer here; but ef yer cuss dis chile I'll whup yer myse'f, an' dat right now!" She snatched up a broken bush from the ground and the man cowered into silence.

"Don't, mammy, don't," begged Billy. "Le's call grandfather, please."

"I gwine," she answered, "I gwine ter call 'im now."

The man tugged at the chain and muttered hoarsely as they passed out of his sight.

But scarcely were they gone before Jerry Binns came hurrying up.

"My God!" he gasped. "Jason, is that you thar?"

"You sees me," answered the other sullenly.

The newcomer produced a key.

"I seed ther boy a-fixin' of that devilment," he said, "but, honest to God, I never dremp hit wuz you!"

"Stop yer damned preachin' now an' git me out'n here," snarled the other profanely.

Entering the barn, Long Jerry loosed the man and watched him sneak away; then he went back sorrowfully to the shelter of the overseer's house. But when Jason Simpkins reached the borders of the creek-swamp he turned and shook his fist at the gray old house where the Maysons lived.

"You raskil," he threatened. "You damned little raskil, you! I'll even up wi' you some er



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these days, an' wi' that black wench o' yourn, too. I shore will do that thing."

He turned and stepped quickly into the cover of the swamp, then, lest they should follow him with dogs, he waded in the creek. Afterward, when he had followed the stream for a mile, he turned aside into the pine woods and departed in a long, swinging walk. Thus Jason Simpkins vanished for a space of five long years from his haunts in the Keowee country.



CHAPTER VI

THE LITTLE GIRL WHO LOOKED FOR THE ANGELS

THE summer had passed; the autumn of '76, made famous throughout the South by that political battle which established forever the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon over the African, had come and gone; chill winter had wrapped the drowsy earth in his blanketings of snow, and for months the great full pulse of Nature had throbbed in lessening cadences. Then one day the sun had slipped back softly across his magic boundaries and had laughed in the face of the rested world, and the earth, refreshed, had thrown aside its coverings, for spring had come—spring, with its young grass shooting up: spring, with its blossoms, and its bird-songs, and its ceaseless hum of whirring insect sounds.

Everywhere in the Keowee country the warm and odorous air was filled with a smell of smoke and of pungent burning weeds, for out in the farmlands the "hoe-hands" were clearing the rubbish from last year's stubble-fields, while full and clear from across the green breadths of the level fallows came the whoop and halloo of the plowmen and the lusty braying of the busy mules. Down by the creek-swamps the white oaks were leafing; the noisy crows were abroad in search of corn; while for Negroes and white men alike the season marked a busy time. The old year, with its drought and its

difficulties, was far in the past; hope was but just reborn; and Nature was bidding her children to start life all anew. Winter is the season for fireside lingerings; in summer the shadows are pleasant; in autumn even, in the harvest time of the year, one may walk abroad leisurely and feel that he is doing God's service; but when spring comes he must lay hold willingly with both his hands. God pity the man who has never felt young April's imperious call to labour! God pity the man who, when the south-wind is blowing and good mellow soil lies open to the sun, does not wish to plant a seed somewhere and to tend it!

They were "bedding" the cotton land on the Chambliss farm, and the dew of the early morning was still on the roadside grass. Out in the middle of one of the fields old Unk' Hezekiah Jones, who had lain up all the winter "wid de rheumatiz," was talking to the plow-hands and improving his spare moments by leaping into the air and cracking his heels together. Finally he leaped very high and succeeded in striking them twice before they reached the ground; then he sat down satisfied.

"Dar now," he ejaculated self-approvingly, "who dat done say ole Hezerkier ain't no count no mo'?"

"Yah! Yah! Yah!" laughed the plowmen, driving their steady mules past him and opening their long, brown furrows. "Unker Hezerkier feel de spring."

Stepping daintily across the furrows, a little girl, bareheaded and brown-eyed, came down a foot-path now half obliterated by the dragging plows. In her hands were field-daisies that the plows had uprooted, together with a cluster of the scentless pale-blue dog-violets that grow in the shady fence-

corners. Common enough the blossoms were, and they were really not good of their kind, but to the child they were all very beautiful. Holding them carefully, she came close to Unk' Hezekiah and sat down on a stone.

"See my flowers?" she asked. "Don't you want some of them, Uncle Hezekiah?"

To the old man the blossoms were simply weeds. He had spent a lifetime rooting such things out of the cotton land, but he took them now and pretended to admire the gift, while in reality he was looking at the child.

"Des lak her maw," he mused. "Des lak her maw used ter look when she wuz a little gal."

Then he shut his eyes and pretended to nod while his thoughts went back to the time when the child's mother had just been born. He and Cynthy Ann were married in that year, he remembered. How quickly the time had passed. He could scarcely realize that he had seen so many springs. Why, it seemed but yesterday that Squire Jones had given Cynthy Ann and himself for a wedding present to that same daughter of his. That was a big wedding, too—a wedding such as "de quality" always gave to their children. And now his mistress was a widow of staid middle age and her child sat by his side in the sun.

Suddenly Unk' Hezekiah began to feel old again. For twenty years he had been foreman for old Squire Jones; for twenty more he had "pitched de crap" in de Chambliss fields; but long ago he had been laid aside like a worn-out tool. Now he pottered about as he chose and subsisted on the bounty of his mistress. Rising to his feet, he started back to his cabin—a pleasant cabin it was,

and this morning the peach-trees that shaded it were like pink-and-white clouds, so full were they of bloom—and with him went the child, laughing and chattering. Once there, they inspected the little garden at the back of the house, and Unk' Hezekiah pointed out the generous spaces which he had left for "watermillions" and the corner which he had set aside for the child's very own. Then he told her a wonderful story of the tiny wood-folk who come in the night time to the Negro cabins to sip the sweets from the tiny trumpets of the honeysuckles and to dance in the light of the blinking stars. Wonderful people are these, for their mirrors are made of dewdrops and their beds of milk-weed down, and they bring pleasant dreams to the good children, but to the bad ones groans and restlessness. So between the story and the garden the morning passed, and presently Julie Ann came to take the little girl home.

But when the afternoon had come and old Ben, the almost superannuated mule, had been harnessed to the buggy, the child and her mother set out for the Mayson place. It was rarely that they went forth thus save to church on Sundays, but Mrs. Mayson and Mrs. Chambliss were friends, and for a long time Mrs. Mayson had been ill, and to-day she was said to be worse. So they journeyed on past the fields in which the plowmen were singing, and crossed the rippling waters of the creek and climbed the long red hill on the other side. The distance was not great, but the mule made up for that by the slowness of his gait, so that they were tired when they drew up at last under the oak trees in front of the old white house.

The child looked for Billy and for Abram, but the

yard and the open spaces seemed deserted. Out by the garden fence the locust trees were all in bloom, and among them the bees were humming in a drowsy monotone, while from a swaying cherry-tree in the orchard an amorous redbird flashed his showy wings, to the admiration of his mate. By the overseer's house Luke sat dejectedly holding his tow head in his hands, and this was all.

When the two had alighted they went in quietly.

"Where's Billy, mamma?" the little one asked, but her mother hushed her questioning. Billy's mamma was going away, she explained—was going to-day, perhaps, and Billy was very sad. It was not good that a little girl should talk much at such a time as this.

There were many things that the child wished to ask, even though she restrained herself. It did not seem right at all that Billy's mamma should go away from him and leave him all alone. *Her* mother would not do so, she was sure. Out on the deserted porch, where they had left her, she puzzled over the problem until she thought that she had solved it.

Inside the house the Negroes went noiselessly to and fro. Aunt Clairsy was there, and Mammy Nancy, and old Isom, who was the butler of the house. From her place on the porch the child could see Mrs. Binns, too, sitting in the hallway and knitting; and after a time the doctor, passing outward, stopped and whispered something, and Mrs. Binns put her apron to her eyes and sobbed. Then the minister, who had served the people of the neighbourhood for a generation past, came into the porch, and as he went with bowed head through the door of the hall the child followed him timidly.



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Then she stopped and listened, while the preacher went on, for away off toward the other wing of the house she could hear a muffled tread as of some one walking up and down. She did not know that old John Mayson was pacing his library floor, and that in his lonely, tired soul there was a struggle such as had been there when his only son had died.

No, she did not know that; but through an open door down at the end of the hall she could see the tremulous old minister kneeling and praying. About him were others; and beyond them all, her yellow hair spread like liquid gold over the clean white coverings of the pillows, lay Billy's mother, white and still and beautiful. Through some crevice in the darkened window a ray of sunlight had crept, and streaming across the room it fell upon the hair and crowned it with an aureole of glory; from the outer air the western breeze came drifting in, bringing like some incense-bearer the sweet, heavy breath of the locust bloom; and reflected upon the close-drawn window shades the shadows of the swaying trees swept back and forth as if to make obeisance.

"The Lord is my Shepherd," recited the minister; "I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside the still waters."

True; and the waters of death are still—still and dark and deep. The face of the sick woman was like chiselled marble and her eyes had ceased to open. The boy at her side leaned forward breathlessly. The minister read steadily on:

"Yea, though I walk—" there was just a little break in his voice, but he recovered himself—

"though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil——"

"Mamma!"

It was but a whisper, but the child with her sensitive ears caught the heartbreak in the tones. But one other person heard, and that person was the woman. Already the darkness was compassing her about; already the chill, swift river of death was lapping its bitter waters about her feet, but even in her mortal extremity she turned back to answer yet one more time the agonized cry of her child, and snatched a moment from grim eternity that she might comfort him.

"Son! Little son!" Her blue eyes opened and she smiled. Her thin hand wandered, seeking his, and finding that, she was satisfied.

To the girl-child in the doorway the room seemed holy. She watched lest presently an angel should come and fill it with the glory of God. So imminent did the Presence seem that she bowed her head in simple faith, then looked up disappointed and wondering. The angel had come and had gone, but she was little and very ignorant—she did not know. Softly she slipped away, thinking only of Billy now. Out in the sunlight she covered her face and wept—she would have helped him if she could.

Four months later the Mayson house had but a single occupant. In its dim halls and its spacious chambers a lonely old man paced restlessly throughout the wearisome days, and as he walked he was planning always how this might be saved and that, so that in the end Billy Mayson might surely come back to his own.



The Little Girl

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But far away in the drowsy old city that sleeps on the white beach-sand by the shores of the infinite sea, Billy was measuring himself against the best that his State could produce. It is only among men and the sons of men that the lessons of life may be learned—how to triumph modestly and how to endure defeat, and in all things that are for the public good to bear one's share justly, as becomes a gentleman. Therefore Billy faced his new life bravely, and it was only at night, when the silent stars came out and the world was all asleep, that he suffered himself to remember that he was only a little boy—a child crying in the darkness for the touch of his mother's hand.

But on the Mayson place the creek sang through all the bright days its song to the pebbly shallows, and in the good, red fields seed-time came in its season—seed-time and growth and harvest—and in all the Keowee country the people dwelt in peace.

So gradually the long years passed, and John Archer added to his wealth, and old John Mayson grew older still, and Billy approached his manhood in age and in learning and in stature.



CHAPTER VII

A JOURNEY TO BELLVILLE

THE years had dealt kindly with the child. The uneventful life of the countryside had denied her many things—the society of congenial friends, all contact with the outside world, and any wide knowledge of the relations of things—but instead of these it had also given her much. Tall she had grown, trim of figure and straight and sound of limb, carrying in every feature the hall-mark of her lineage and the pride of her birth and her blood. The glow and the zest of health, too, were hers, and all the lissom grace of that physique which develops unrestrained in the sane, good company of field and stream and sun. In her brown hair the tricky shadows of the evening played—shadows that come and go and that are edged with the sunset's tawny gold—and her eyes were the colour of the chestnuts from the deep October woods. A daughter of the South she was growing to be, tender and true and womanly, impulsive to a degree, yet hedged about and restrained by the influence of generations of gentle blood. An erring woman she might easily have become; a coarse woman or a weak woman, never.

Little of orthodox schooling had been hers—some lessons from her mother, some others from a governess who for awhile had been employed, for the rest an unlimited range in the miscellaneous



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library which her father had left in the house. But the broad old southern countryside she knew, and she loved it in all its moods—the white silences of winter, the vibrant touch of the spring, the hazy, luxurious summertime, and autumn's gorgeous colourings. Her mother, her books and her horse, then the long red stretches of the roads, the fields, and the hills in the purple distance—these made up her life. Too young for love or lovers in the more conventional sense, yet already she had her dream, and, as young girls are accustomed to do, she hid it very carefully. It was a vague dream and impossible, but in its essence it concerned Billy Mayson. Long ago, when in her defense he had fought whole bands of imaginary Indians, tracking them down relentlessly among the tangle mazes of the bean vines that grew in her mother's garden, or when from behind breastworks of straw he had beaten off the attacking "Yankees," her little heart had thrilled at his dauntless courage, and in its inmost depths she had dubbed him knight, and Abram had been his squire. And when night had come and she was in her trundle-bed, and the lights had burned low, and Julie Ann had ceased to sing, then in her dreams she was the maiden imprisoned in the ogre's castle underneath whose battlements, with lance and pennon and armour bright, came Billy riding to the rescue.

With the years, ogre and castle had vanished, and head-piece and buckler and lance, but Billy remained. Not the real Billy—she had scarcely seen him twice since he had been sent to school—but an idealised and transfigured Billy, who had no freckles across his nose and who walked and bowed with courtly grace. A handsome man and

true was the Billy of her dreams, and she was his loyal lady.

Foolish and unreal enough it was. People do not tolerate such illusions in these very practical days: the world is too learned for that. Santa Claus does not come down the chimney now; the fairies all are dead; and our poor knights are be-draggled with the ditch-water of reality. God help us, now that we are grown too wise! Scarce faith have we in anything. We trace back effects to their causes; we follow the lily-stem down to its muddy origin, and, plucking thence handfuls of slime, we hold these aloft and cry, "Behold the lily." Alas and alas! Who shall loose us from the burden of this knowledge?

But Annie of the Chambliss farm was busy with her dreams. No one was by to shake her or to rudely awaken her. Her mother, remembering a like experience, may have suspected something of the current of her daughter's thought, but, if so, then in pity she held her peace.

Reality would come soon enough; trouble would come soon enough. Why grudge the child her playthings or her castles of painted air?

Still, although there was time for rest and for reverie, the girl's life was a busy one enough. Since her father's death the plantation cares had fallen to the mother's share, and little by little Annie had been taught to bear a part of the work. And as the older Negroes who might be trusted implicitly grew fewer and fewer, and the younger "hands," whose boasted freedom had degenerated into license, came to take the vacant places, the burden of management grew in weight so that Annie Chambliss must needs ride often into Keowee

to check the accounts, or to Bellville to pay her mother's taxes or to attend to other affairs.

But on the first Monday morning in June her destination was Bellville, since the auditor's office was in the court-house there, and the plantation returns must be made to him—so many acres of land, so many "head" of horses and of mules and of cattle—that the lawmakers might be well informed and might justly lay the tax. To accomplish her purpose she might have ridden into Keowee and thence have gone by train, or else she might have used a buggy; but the buggy was slow and cumbersome, and a journey by rail would necessitate her tarrying overnight; moreover, both she and her saddle-horse were fresh and vigorous.

"Saddle Chester, Dan," she told the stable boy; and accordingly the big bay horse which she herself had reared was brought out in front of the gate.

"'By, mamma," she called, as she took her place in the saddle. "Let him go, Dan," and swinging at a canter through the open "big gate" that stood at the end of the home lane, she shook her riding-switch mockingly at the half-dozen black urchins who peered grinning through the high rail fence.

"Stick o' caindy, Mis' Annie!" they called out plaintively. "Fetch us a stick o' caindy!" While from the topmost rail old Hezekiah's grandson, a tiny lad and therefore clad solely in an airy cotton shirt, shrilled noisily:

"'Tick o' caindy, Mi' Annie. A gre' big 'tick, ple', ma'am."

The big horse, fresh from his stable and strong, swept her by them, and she turned her head to answer, laughingly:

"You're greedy, Ben Jim! You're a greedy

boy," she cried; but the rail had turned, and Ben Jim had toppled and was prone in the dust of the road.

The horse, however, gave her no time in which to succor her *protege*. The day was fine, he had reached the open road, and his clean hoofs beat a merry tattoo on the resonant, hard-trodden clay. Past the orchard and the Juneapple trees, now heavy with red-ripe fruit, past the cotton land and the acres of yellow wheat, here skirting the creek-side pastures, there splashing through the rippling ford, they pushed straight on till they reached a long, dusty stretch of highway that lay like a crinkled brown ribbon between the wastes of the freshly cut oat-stubble and the broad, green rows of the corn. There, because of the powdery dust, the swift pace slackened, and Chester settled down first to "fox-trotting" and presently into a sober but deceiving "swinging-walk," coming by this means in the space of a short three miles to another and broader highway—the Keowee and Bellville "big road." This they entered, crossing the railway track, and striking straight away across the ridges until at last they forded another stream and drew rein in the centre of the Bellville "square."

The old hotel in Bellville faces this square, and the court-house is on the farther side. In the town there is also a new hotel—one built four-square of brick and flush with the street, a clumsy turret crowning each of its corners—a garish thing of which the citizens are proud. To this, therefore, most of the custom tends.

But although its glories are obscured and its guest-chambers are empty, the old wooden building on the "square" clings fast to its cherished traditions.

Sweet-smelling roses—the damask roses that our grandmothers loved—still burgeon and bloom in the roomy yard, and privet and evergreen box hedge the winding walks thereof; on the long, low porches of the building itself the honeysuckles clamber and cast a grateful shade, while within the doors of the inn, a hostess, fat withal and comfortable, greets the wayfarer cheerily and sets his mind at ease.

Annie knew the place thoroughly; the fat woman was a friend of hers—a staunch friend by virtue of frequent and lucrative custom—and it was a quiet spot where a young girl might come and go without remark, subject only to her will and pleasure. Here, therefore, she came on this occasion to stable Chester, to fill at her leisure the long, printed “blank” which the auditor had given her, and to rest. It was cool on the vine-covered piazza—cool and still and pleasant.

“Sit right down here, my dear!” The kindly, broad face of the woman was beaming in thrifty good humour, and she jingled her bunches of keys. “Sit down an’ rest. I’ll send you a table directly, to do that writin’ on.”

The girl sat down and pushed back her straying hair, then she looked out across the great, open square, that was all carpeted by the sunshine and figured by the creeping shadows. Over by the stone steps of the court-house a group of white men stood laughing loudly and talking; beyond them a Negro was asleep in the sun; nearer, a girl was swinging a red parasol and coming on slowly along the rough, brick-paved sidewalk. She was quite a pretty girl, thought Annie, a girl of about her own age, yet a girl

seemingly who knew a great deal and who was very sure of herself.

"Yassum. Right yere?"

It was a Negro woman with the table. Having arranged it, she went to get pen and ink. The girl with the parasol was coming in at the gate. From the doorway some one greeted her.

"Oh, Laura! Come in! And you are back? *Did* you like Charleston much?"

It was the landlady's daughter who met the visitor at the door, kissing her on each cheek and hovering about her effusively. After a little time they passed inside. The sitting-room window was just opposite Annie's head, and as the conversation was kept in play she could not choose but hear. Nevertheless, she worked away at her paper.

"Acres?"— She jotted down the answer in neat, well-rounded figures. "Cows?"— The voices grew excitedly higher.

"It was delightful! My first ball, Julia! All the college boys were there." The talk sank into a confidential whisper. There were giggles and high-keyed tittering.

"Mayson?"

"Yes. *Billy* Mayson, he said. And he's from this county, too. Isn't it odd?" Again the voices were lowered and the whispering was fast and furious.

Annie stopped her writing and suddenly her face flushed red. What right had they to be talking of Billy so? What right had they to be talking of Billy *at all*— Billy, who in her fancyings was so true to herself alone? An unreasoning anger possessed her—anger against the speakers and against herself. She arose and moved the

table to the other end of the piazza. Then she reasoned with herself. What right had she to be angry? What was Billy to her, after all? What more than a name—than an idea?

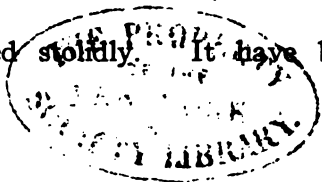
She finished her schedule and went across to the court-house and filed it, an odd sense of unhappiness upon her. Afterward she rested, and later, when the heat of the day was past and the afternoon was come, she mounted and rode homeward. Very slowly went Chester that afternoon, for his mistress was thinking. It was folly of the sheerest sort, this serious mood of hers, but she was little more than a child, and an end had come to a long and beautiful dream. Henceforward she knew that, come happiness from whatever source it might, for her there would be no more castles, no more knights, no more captive ladies.

Her mood was not a cheerful one, and she was glad of the lonely way that she might escape companionship, but as she reached the point where her home path turned aside from the main-travelled road Chester threw forward the points of his ears and quickened his lagging steps. Raising her head, the girl saw that just in front an ungainly mule was slouching, bearing upon its back a loose-jointed, tow-headed figure. Rider and beast seemed somehow strangely akin in their apathetic, unkempt shiftlessness. Annie touched her horse sharply.

"Evenin', Mis' Annie," called the wayfarer, as Chester pushed alongside and the girl started and smiled.

"Why, Luke!" she answered. "How are you? And how is Mrs. Binns, and how is Parmeely?"

The fellow smiled stolidly. It have been a



long time, Mis' Annie, sence we-all is seed yer," he said.

"That is true," replied the girl; "but your mother—you haven't told me of her. I haven't seen her since she moved."

Luke spat out his tobacco. "Maw, she air well; an' Parmeely, she air well. We is a-livin' on ther Jester place this year, but we is a-gwine ter move come Chris'mus."

"Why is that?" asked the girl. "You have moved two or three times lately."

Luke shook his head moodily.

"Niggers!" he replied. "Niggers! Ther niggers got so thick 'bout here 'at we lef' ther neighbourhood. Now hit seems like they is a-crowdin' of us agin." He threw up his head in sullen anger. "Niggers!" he snarled. "Allers havin' trouble long o' them! Ain't no chanst fer a white man no mo'! Niggers gits ther bes' lan'; niggers gits ther bes' mules; niggers makes ther bes' craps! Unk' Jason he have come back, an' he 'lows, he do, 'at we-all white folks 'ull hatter clean ther niggers out—at ef we whups 'em some, then they 'ull go 'long off f'um here an' 'ull let we-alls be. Paw he 'lows 'at hit won't nigh do—at hit 'ull jes' make some mo' trouble. But I dunno; I holds wi' Unk' Jason—at's what I does."

He would have spoken further, but Annie could not understand his complaining. Touching her horse with the switch, she rode on ahead, leaving him to follow as he would.

"Good-by, Luke," she called.

"Good-by, Mis' Annie," the "poor white" replied. "Mammy'll be main glad 'at I seed you."



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Still, after she was gone he talked on, communing with himself and grumbling.

"I holds wi' Unk' Jason," he repeated. "Paw he air too easy. We-alls 'ull hatter clean them niggers out. Sometime hit 'ull come ter that shore."

The mule slouched across the "shoulder" of the hill, the man's weather-stained hat bobbed oddly for a moment above the intervening ridge, then the road turned down to the creek and the hat, too, vanished from sight.



CHAPTER VIII

BILLY COMES HOME FROM SCHOOL

THE summer had passed away softly and the lusty autumn had come; and the frost with busy fingers had painted the pasture lands in russet and the cotton fields in sobre grays. On the hillsides of the Mayson place the scarlet sassafras gleamed like leaping flame and the loosening leaves of the woodlands were tinted with crimson and gold. On all the roads in the Keowee country great, lumbering wagons laden with cotton or with yellow corn crept toward the barns, while out of the misty lowlands came long-drawn dying echoes and the chanting of the harvest hands. To Billy Mayson—Billy Mayson, who had at last come home—it all seemed good, and his glance fell satisfied on hill and valley and stream and wood.

Not many times during his school life had he been back to the Keowee country. His grandfather had wished that he should gain experience in the world, and had sent him during his vacations on visits to relatives or on such small travels as a slender purse was able to bear. Later he had arranged these things to suit himself and had gone in the summer seasons wherever his fancy led. One such summer he had spent as an assistant on a railway survey; during another he had strolled, staff in hand and by unfrequented ways, from the

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low tidewater country up through the sand and the hills to the steep slopes of the western mountains; and once he had gone "down to the sea in ships," cruising in the little "coastwise" fruit schooners among the far Bahamas and along the Florida reefs.

During term-time he had done his school work, not very brilliantly, perhaps, but honestly and in singleness of spirit, for he had come long since to realise the sacrifice which his grandfather had made and to accept the obligation which had been thus tacitly laid upon him. He had come, too, to understand his grandfather better—to appreciate that self-contained, steady soul which, though feeling woe, refused utterly to voice it. And when Billy saw the petty privations which the old man had endured, and thought of what these meant, his heart smote him remorsefully. Surely, it seemed to him, that age, after a lifetime of effort, deserved its privileges—its liberty to cease from labour, its rest in the gathering shadows, and its quiet bedtime at last. These things John Mayson had denied himself. His day's work had been almost done, yet with the approach of evening he had doubled it willingly, so that now he must fear the gathering of the night lest the shadows hinder him and lest the darkness find his task unfinished. Other men said that John Mayson really was an ambitious fool, but Billy saw only the pathos in the old man's last brave effort.

As for himself, Billy had grown tall and deep-chested and strong, also his journeyings had brought him to know himself and to rely on his own resources, and this latter habit had come nigh to bringing about sorrow. For it had not seemed right to him

that he should be idle or dependent. There was no work on the Mayson place by which he might earn his bread, therefore he had become dissatisfied and had cast about diligently for some occupation whereby to supply his needs. Fortunately enough for his grandfather's happiness, his search had been unsuccessful; nevertheless he had kept it up resolutely, so that knowledge of his efforts came after awhile to the old man's ears and troubled him. Could it be that Billy, after the unlovely fashion of the times, would turn his back upon the soil—that he would forget the home wherein he had been bred and which of right belonged to him? Else whence this desire to go again to the towns, to the hot and feverish streets, there to work and to live? Once the Colonel might have endured even this disappointment, but now he was too old and had striven too hard and had planned too long. So in his fear he had spoken to the lad.

"I want you to stand by me, Billy," he had said—"by me and by the land, my boy. I want you to love it as I have done, to care for it as I have done, and to live on it as I have done; and when you have done with it and with life, Billy, I want you to pass it on to a Mayson as, please God, I intend to do."

And afterward Billy had explained his own desires and his hopes, and his grandfather had been satisfied and had grown proud of him. Thus they had settled the matter between them and each had come to understand. And as a result of this conversation, Billy had unearthed the law-books that once his father had used, and had begun to study them, hoping that the time would soon come when he might be admitted to practise in the courts

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and might thus be enabled to open an office in Keowee or perhaps in Bellville.

Therefore, with all of his troubles settled and his aim in life defined, with no carking cares in the present and no heavy shadows darkening his future, he was glad to be at home again—glad of Mammy Nancy's motherly solicitude and of Aunt Clairsey's toothsome cookery; glad to live close to the good gray earth once more, to watch the play of the sunlight on the autumn leaves, and to listen to the field-cricket chirping ere the coming of the winter rains. Matters of business were shaping themselves well, so his grandfather had told him—the cotton crop was selling for a good price, Archer had been strikingly indulgent, and when the mortgage next fell due there was money laid aside with which to meet it. In view of his cheerfulness of spirit, and because of the vague, still beauty of the afternoon, Billy had abandoned his books and had sallied forth on foot to renew his acquaintance with the Chambliss folk, whom, since his return, he had not seen.

He did not hurry, however, after he had passed through the yard and the gardens and had gained the road, and presently he turned aside into the "nigh way" which led through the "bottoms" and across the foot-log which spanned the creek. And as he loitered along the path, trailing his fingers as he went against the tall and blossoming golden-rod that stood beside the way, he heard from away down under the brow of the hill a voice which seemed to him very familiar. It was a full, rich, sonorous voice, and its owner was exalting it in song.

"You kin make yer a bargain an' set yer a date,
You kin git up early an' wuk tell hit's late,
Hit'll make no diff'unce at de settlin' time
Fer de white man sho' gwineter fotch yer out behine."

Billy smiled and stepped aside and waited. He had heard that song on fishing trips, on excursions through the "big woods," and after many productive raids on the plantation watermelon patch. The singer came on unconsciously.

"You kin wuk een de cotton, you kin wuk een de co'n,
You kin plow dat mule what his name is John,
You kin put down yer nort an' yer five'll make a figger,
But hit's all fer de white man an' none fer de nigger."

The voice drew nearer, and in the next moment a stout black form with a face that shone like polished ebony swung itself with powerful strides around a bend in the path.

"Well!" ejaculated Billy, and the pedestrian stopped in surprise, then he bent, clapped his hands on his knees, and roared with joyous laughter.

"Hit's Mars' Billy! Well, I'll jes' swar! Mars' Billy, I sho' is proud ter see yer. An' you'se lookin' mighty well, too—lookin' han'sum. Yas, sir, you is dat!"

Billy held out, palm downward, a half-closed hand, and the Negro approached, his full voice falling to a lower tone and sweeping delightedly through the whole range of insinuating cadences.

"You ain't got a dime, or maybe a quarter, jes' lyin' 'roun' loose 'bout yer ole clo'se, is yer, Mars' Billy?"

Billy laughed; he had anticipated the request, and turning his hand, he exposed the "quarter" in his open palm.

"How are you, Abram; how are you?" he asked heartily, as the Negro pocketed the coin and shook the hand that had held it. "Where are you living now, and what have you been doing, and how are you getting along?"

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Abram rolled his eyes and grinned until his white teeth shone.

"I 'spec' Mammy Clairisy done tole yer," he answered deprecatingly. "I wuks long er Mars' John Archer now—lives wid him over yonder een town an' sweeps up his office an' sich like. Does yer 'member him, Mars' Billy?"

"Oh, yes," replied Billy carelessly, "I know him. But tell me about yourself."

"Yas, sir," the Negro continued, "an' I'se doin' right well, I thanks yer, sir. I went ter school a li'l bit, jes' atter you lef'—learned ter read putty well, I did, an' ter write some. Den I wuked here on de ole place fer a right smart while, an' den Mars' Archer hired me. Yas, sir, I'se a-doin' tolable well. I reckon' ole marster are well, ain't he, Mars' Billy? I ain't seed him fer de longes'. An' mammy she are well, I reckon'? I'se a gwine over datter way now—wanted ter see mammy a li'l bit."

He was silent a moment while Billy answered as to the good health of his grandfather and of old Aunt Clairisy, but presently he went on again in a burst of sudden confidence.

"Mars' Billy, when you gits er orfice ter ten' ter I'se a gwine ter come an' wuk fer you. Couldn' nobody suit yer like Ab'm—could dey now?"

"Not if I wished to go fishing," answered Billy with a smile.

Abram roared again with laughter.

"I jes' declar'!" he exclaimed, "you ain't fergot dem fishin' trips nuther! I'se got ter be gwine now, but I'se comin' ter see yer' fo' long, Mars' Billy, an' den we'll talk erbout dem ole times. We sho' wuz lads dem days—dat's what we wuz!"

Billy stood for a moment watching the other

as he departed. Abram had not "turned out well," his grandfather had told him, and was, in fact, inclined to be "lazy and triffin'!" This, of course, was the real reason why the Negro had preferred the light work that Archer had to do to the heavier toil of the farm. But although Abram had apparently deserted, Billy knew that the man's heart was still with the people of the Mayson place. As for himself, he was sorry not to have Abram with him, be the Negro's defects apparent or not, for Abram had been his playmate and he was Abram's young "marster." The relation was a binding one—henceforth Abram would levy on Billy a certain irregular tax, payable in "small change" and in cast-off garments, and in return therefor he would give to Billy the unquestioned and unquestioning loyalty of a clansman to his chief. And Billy was not sorry for this—true friends were not so plentiful.

Thinking of these things, Billy resumed his way, following the widening path down to the level corn land and out across the bottoms. Then when he had crossed the creek, he climbed the long slope on the opposite side, and did not halt again until he had reached the gate at the end of the Chambliss lane. There, however, he stopped and rested his arms on the crooked rail fence and looked about musingly.

The house and its surroundings were but little changed, he found—so little that it seemed but yesterday since he had seen it last. There to the right was the garden where he and Annie had played, its tall palings of split red oak still fencing it about; yonder were the barns and the stables, and half-way down the shelving slope along which ran the path



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to the spring was the homely front of what had been Unk' Hezekiah's cabin, but it was not so neat now, nor in such good repair since its old-time occupant had been gathered to his fathers and one less careful had come to inhabit it. Beyond the cabin were the wide, brown fields and the long lines of unkempt, overgrown hedgerows where the mocking-birds used to nest.

To the left of the gate, flanked on one side by the low bulk of the rambling farmhouse and on others by the dusty road and the broad, weed-bordered lane, the gnarled old apple-trees of the orchard stood. There were not many apples now on these—just one here and there hanging from the topmost boughs and gleaming purple and red in the amber light of the autumn afternoon, but even the few were sufficient to attract his attention and to give colour and direction to his thoughts. Together they used to gather these late apples, did he and Annie Chambliss—he shaking them down, and she laughing and catching them in her outspread apron. One incident he remembered perfectly: it had happened at just this season.

They had come to the orchard—he and the little girl—and away up in the top of that tall tree yonder by the opposite fence he had seen an apple which was as round and red as October pippins are prone to be and which in all its parts seemed perfect. And, after the manner of a boy, he had longed to possess that apple, and had climbed after it laboriously, even tearing his coat in his ill-considered eagerness, and finally he had reached the tree-top. Then he had put out his hand and had drawn the slender branch which held the fruit in toward himself; but when he would have plucked the apple the

branch had escaped him and twig and rosy fruit had swung far out of his reach. But afterward, when he had given over his effort and had reached the ground again, the apple had dropped of its own accord, and behold, it was worm-eaten and worthless. Just above his head, within easy reach, there was a much better apple which he might have taken at first and without any effort at all, but he had not noticed that one until Annie had pointed it out. How she had laughed at him then !

Well, Annie was older now and so was he, but he doubted if either was happier ; and it was almost in his heart to wish that neither of them had ever grown up, so enticing seemed to him those careless childhood pleasurings. Only, he would make a better choice of apples, he thought, after his odd experience.

A gentle breeze had sprung up. Over in the orchard the apples swayed to and fro, and on a dead branch somewhere a sapsucker tapped monotonously. Then Billy heard the sound of voices—of a black woman arguing with tongue and stick, and of Ben Jim replying with wailings. Breaking off from his reverie, Billy smiled reminiscently and went up the lane to the house.

CHAPTER IX

JASON PAYS A VISIT TO HIS RELATIVES

THE population that is found in the Carolina hill-country is by no means homogeneous, and in the neighbourhood of the smaller towns the separation of this population into differing strata is particularly noticeable. Apparent to all, of course, is the broad line of social delimitation which the ever-dominant Caucasian has drawn between himself and the representatives of the Negro race, for the Negroes are a people apart—their colour bars them.

No such sharp distinction, however, parts the white man from his neighbour white, therefore the various classes of these shade into each other so imperceptibly that no absolute boundary may be fixed. Three classes exist, nevertheless, and in their typical forms exhibit marked differences—differences that appear in habits of thought, in manner of speech, in conceptions of education and of religion, and in nothing more strikingly than in the attitude of each toward the Negroes.

Of these subdivisions, the first and least numerous is made up of the old-time planters and a few—too few—of their descendants. In the slavery days this class was the dominating element of the population, and in it was centred the wealth, the highest intelligence and the political power of the State. They were the leisure class; their lands were broad,

their houses imposing, their Negroes numerous. They were large men; often men of many virtues, sometimes men of many vices, but always they were men. A certain grandiloquence was characteristic of their kind, an overgrown estimate of their own importance, and many and peculiar prejudices; but pettiness and meanness were not among their foibles.

Never extensive in numbers, their class is nearly extinct. The Civil War shore away from them forever their wealth, their prestige and their power. Some have abandoned the old houses which their fathers inhabited and have drifted away from the hills; some—the weaker, perhaps—have become ordinary farmers; some, business men; a few still hold to the old ideals. And, odd as it may seem, it is among these one-time slave-owners and their children that the Negroes find their best friends, their most lenient judges, their safest advisers. These know the Negro—have known him all the days of their lives—and they realise his limitations and understand his point of view.

As a people they are to be interpreted in the light of former times. They represent the old South—the South of law and of order. In the day of their power they punished crime sternly, but they punished at the hands of the law. Night-ridings and mobs and lynchings are the products of a later epoch. White men have been hung in Carolina because of the murder of slaves—it may hardly be shown that the “freedmen” have been so well avenged. It is only “since the war” that a Negro has been shot in “self-defense” as the poor fellow was running away. And if these “aristocrats” believed in duels they at least eschewed the street-shootings that have taken the duels’ place.



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But these old men are going—they will soon be gone. Peace be to their ashes!

A second and much larger class of southern whites is that which comprises the farmers and the business men. The variations in this division are greater than in all the others combined. Some of the individuals are educated, some are not; some are natives of the region in which they are found and some are not; and their points of origin are as diverse as their personalities are. These are the men of the moment, shrewd, generally industrious, and given, universally, to a hot pursuit of the always elusive dollar. Politically and financially these people—to use their own expressive phrase—are “in the saddle.” Upon the order which they have supplanted they look with half-sneering, half-pitying contempt. They have no respect for a civilisation which failed to “get there.”

From the mass of this fermenting and unsettled class a new aristocracy is being formed, and the people are ready to acknowledge the overlordship of wealth. To them commercial enterprise seems a cardinal virtue, and a man is said to be “good” just so long as his cheques are. Yet, as a whole, these people are not essentially bad—they are simply busy. Their attention and their energies are so occupied that, outside of business matters, their ideas are wholly conventional—education means a diploma, religion, church-membership. The Negro troubles them not at all—that is to say, as an abstract proposition—and to them he has long since ceased to be a “question.” When he proves profitable they employ and protect him within reasonable limits, and when he does not they take steps to make him so. Some use him hardly and

some indulgently, according to their several natures; none behold him with any real and abiding interest.

These are the folk of the "New South." They are sturdy, self-reliant and kindly—if they have time to be kindly. In them lie possibilities: the outcome remains to be seen.

The remaining subdivision is composed entirely of that peculiar element which is known as "poor white." It is not poverty, however, which serves above all things else to distinguish them, but a certain inherent worthlessness of which they seem naively unconscious and are powerless to rid themselves. Men of the other classes are often as poor but they never become "poor whites."

All his life the "poor white" has lived alongside his fellow whites and alongside the Negroes, but he has absorbed little from either, and after two centuries of contact the very inflections of his voice are peculiarly his own. Let one of this class be schooled, let him become a merchant, a physician, a lawyer—whatever occupation you will; let him become as wealthy as Croesus, as learned as Aristotle, as polished as Chesterfield, and let him pronounce but one word which contains the letter "r," and your Southerner will place him unerringly, for "his speech betrayeth him."

The "poor white" lives, usually, on rented land, his house has but two rooms at best, and he rejoices in a plenitude of dogs and of children. The southern winters are kind to him and the summer season is his delight, for it is then that he finds excuse for rest and the "collards" grow well in his garden—a garden, be it said, which his wife and his children "tend." His crop, when he has one, he works "on sheers," but the next year the landlord gets



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a Negro in his stead. The Negro is lazy, but he can be made to work; the poor white is lazy and bears no forcing. If a Negro be whipped or otherwise punished, he forgets it straightway and bears no malice; but the white broods over his injury and nurses it in his heart, it may be for years, and all the while its bitterness grows upon him until at last his opportunity comes. The landlords do not drive the "poor whites" overmuch, lest barns be burned or lest in the light of some gray morning a dead body be found in the road.

For the Negro the "poor white" feels a bitter hatred that was born when the Negro was a slave. The sons of servitude were well fed and sleek—they were "property," and as such were valuable. The "whites" came humbly to the back doors of the "big house" looking as hungry and as gaunt as homeless dogs.

"My name is Sam an' I don' keer a d——n,
I'd ruther be a nigger dan a po' white man"

the Negroes sang, and patted juba, and laughed at them when they came.

Now the Negroes are their competitors in obtaining land for "sheer crops" and in "workin' fer wages," and the farmers prefer the Negro. Besides this there is the social feeling. A white man of the old *regime* will readily shake his old black "mammy's" hand, will bring her into his house and will cause her to be seated, for his position is secure and his standing is assured. But the "poor white" has only his colour—otherwise he is as the Negro—hence he makes the most of that colour, and he thinks himself mistreated when the whites of other classes refuse to recognise its claims.

Much brooding over these things has tintured

the "poor white" with bitterness. It seems to him that his people are ashamed of him and are willing to cast him off. The Negroes jeer at him and it galls him—is he not white? In his ignorance his passions rule him, and an appeal to his prejudice does not pass unheeded.

It was to the "poor white" class that Luke Binns belonged, and Long Jerry Binns, and Jason Simpkins—Jason who had run away from Keowee because of an accidental circumstance connected with a muskrat trap. Five years of travel had taught Jason the unwisdom of direct theft, and but for the two lamed fingers on his clumsy right hand they might have taught him also to forget. As it was, the fingers annoyed him and recalled his humiliation, so that the memory of it rankled in his mind.

Unlike his departure, his return to the Keowee country had not been unheralded. During a year preceding the event Mrs. Binns had upon occasion spoken freely among her neighbours as to how well "Br'e'r Jason wuz a-doin' out thar in Arkansaw" and of how he was "a-gwine ter come back agin" and buy himself a "track o' lan'." As for his misfortune that summer morning at the Mayson place, that happening had never been widely known, for the Colonel had reprimanded Billy and Mammy Nancy, and, for the sake of Mrs. Binns, had commanded that in this matter they should keep silent.

So it was with no misgivings concerning his reception that Jason had reappeared one day in his accustomed haunts; and afterward—for in a small way he had prospered during his absence—he had purchased some acres of land "up at the forks

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of the road" above the Jester place. It was by virtue of these that he first attained to influence, and a later purchase of a pair of scrawny mules established him firmly as a leader among his kind. Then, when it became known that he held control of some votes, Jason acquired a sudden importance in the eyes of the small politicians and of the candidates for office. This exaltation was very evident just before election time. Gifts of whisky and of money were made to Jason then, and solicitude was evinced as to his health and as to his spiritual welfare. Quite incidentally he was also asked how many ballots he would probably be able to "write."

Jason was not altogether a fool and he knew the secret of this importance. Once let the tale of the votes fall short at the counting of the Keowee box and next year his good friends at Bellville—Jake Shaw, the Sheriff, and Chapman, the County "Cheerman," and 'Duke Griggs, the Senator—would greet him with a stare, a long, cold and unfriendly stare, and "the drinks" would be entirely wanting. So Jason was bestirring himself, for this year it seemed to him that he must be especially active, since Jake's tenure of office was in danger. For despite 'Duke Griggs's advice, and despite the timely counsel of the "Cheerman," another man was offering at the "primaries" for nomination to the office of sheriff. Jason knew the new man very well. It was Tom Login, from the river plantations, and really a Keowee man; moreover, Tom was an ex-soldier and therefore would poll a heavy vote, and altogether was "a-goin' to be hard to beat." Even Jason's own "crowd" liked Tom Login, and Jason saw that it behooved him to be up early and to be doing.

So it happened that some eight months after Billy Mayson had been loitering in the Chambliss lane Jason Simpkins closed the door of his house, he being a bachelor, and took the road to the Jester place to consult with Luke and Long Jerry and to see whether he might count on their votes. Of course he felt reasonably certain of these, his relatives, but a man could not be too sure, he argued to himself.

Once the Jester place had been a fine plantation, but evil times had befallen it. The last Jester had been forced to borrow money from Archer and afterward he had not managed well. Therefore he had been unable to pay again, and in time had been "sold out." And somehow the old southern homes do not take kindly to strangers. A new man may build a new house and plant about it vines and gardens, and the southern sun will smile upon these and he and his planting will take hold of the soil and will prosper. But of the hereditary homes let the outsider beware. Very pleasant these seem, with their great white-columned porches and their massive oaks and their red, old-fashioned roses—pleasant and cool and tempting—but they are never a safe thing to invest one's money in. In some way they seem to be a part of the people who have builded them and who have lived in them for so long, and when the last man of that vanishing race passes through the heavy oaken doors, when he stops to pluck a bud from the rose-bush that his mother used to love and reluctantly unlatches the gate and goes out forever, then the old gray building seems to know that its own sons have departed. Within a week the shingles will be dropping from the tall, steep-gabled roof, the shutters

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will hang loose from their hinges, and through the loosened weatherboarding and through new crevices in the time-stained ceilings chill, vagrant winds will enter, and though the world be bright without, these will go moaning through the big bare rooms and down the long, deserted halls. Then the old trees will begin to die, their leaves falling unseasonably and their gaunt and shivering branches lying against the blue of the summer sky, the roses will droop, and out in the once fertile fields the wearing rain will furrow the earth until there is naught but the bald and gully-ribbed hills, the ragged blackberry briers, and the gray-green wastes of the sassafras.

So it had been with the Jester place, and when the land had grown so poor that the Negroes would no longer till it and the old house had come to be but the skeleton of a house, and wild grasses had sprung up in the yard, and of all the trees there was left but a single stem and that a scrubby new-growth pine which had sprung up of its own accord away down at the end of the lane, then Long Jerry Binns had rented the place and had gone there to live. Year after year he had complained of its defects, year after year he announced that next year he would move; but moving requires effort, and Long Jerry was sparing of that.

Desolate, indeed, the place looked as Jason approached it that morning. On the lower lands, except in Jerry's half-tilled fields and in his "patches" of "spindling" corn, Nature was making an effort to reclothe the denuded earth with quick-growing old-field pines, but up on the high red sides of the hill there was nothing but the downward-trending gulleys, a well and a dilapidated stable, and at

the very summit the rain-bleached ruin which had been a notable house. Set high and shorn of its surroundings, the dwelling looked isolated, chill and drear, although the summer sun was beating fiercely upon it and the heat-waves rose and shimmered above the hard, dry acres of barren clay.

Out in the shadow of the house Mrs. Binns was washing clothes, and on a plow-line stretched between two posts Parmeely, her little daughter, was hanging them out to dry. Under the kitchen window a few feet away a lean hound was nosing for scraps, and at the well Luke was chewing tobacco and tinkering a "pa'ttridge" trap, while under a half-fallen porch where the sunlight could not enter Long Jerry Binns lay at his ease asleep.

As he came in sight of all this Jason stopped and looked at Jerry with the air of one who makes a discovery. Then he drew in his breath.

"He air triflin'," he muttered to himself; "Long Jerry shore air a triflin' man!"

"Heyo, Unk' Jason!" called Luke, looking up from his trap; "how yer come on?"

Roused by the interchange of salutations, Long Jerry groaned and stretched himself. Then he rose wearily, for that was his manner of rising, and came to where Jason stood. And after Jason had inquired how Jerry did and Jerry had replied "Po'ly, thang God," they went to the well and sat down.

Apparently there was little in common between the two men. Jason Simpkins was of medium stature and was stoutly built; Long Jerry Binns was tall and thin and stoop-shouldered. Jason was cunning and was to a certain extent industrious; Jerry was simple and lazy. For his superiors

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Jason's face held always a covert menace, Jerry's a patent apology. The one met ill luck with bitter curses, the other with groans and with a broken spirit. Yet for all this they were of the same class, their habits were the same, and they fully agreed in a disposition to find the causes of their troubles always outside of themselves.

"Hit air putty well gone," remarked Jason, indicating the house; "hit had oughter be tore down an' a new house built out'n ther pieces."

Luke looked up sullenly from his work. "Hit ain't jes' ther house," he rejoined; "ther lan's gone an' ther fences air gone—ther whole durn place air plum nigh gone! Ef I wuz pap——" he cast a sidelong glance toward Long Jerry, who sat with his head in his hands, "ef I wuz pap I'd jes' let ole Archer fetch them niggers here whut he's allers a-talkin' erbout—I'd move 'way f'm here."

"I wuddent I!" Jason spoke decisively; "naw, I'll jes' be dogged ef I wud! I'd turn in an' cl'ur some o' them woods down thar by ther branch—thar's plenty uv 'em thar—an' I'd make a good crap fer onct. Archer'll 'low yer ter do that ef yer axes him."

Long Jerry raised his head.

"I'm a-gwine ter cl'ur lan' agin," he said doggedly, "but hit won't be no use ter me. I has cl'ur'd lan' twict afore. Atter I got ther stumps out'n hit, an' ther roots, hit wuz give ter the niggers. Hit shorely ain't no use."

Jason arose:

"I'd like ter see ther nigger," he said ominously, "whut'd dar' ter live on lan' whut I had cl'ur'd. I'd make 'em afeard ter do that thar. Hick'ry ile, Jerry, hick'ry ile, rubbed in hard—that's whut ther

durn niggers need. When they gits thar dost, then maybe they 'ull let us white folks alone!"

Luke nodded approvingly.

"*Then*," said he, "yer speaked a parable."

Long Jerry groaned.

"Hit won't do," he announced; "not nigh, hit won't. But I air a-gwine ter move—gwine this fall—done made a trade ter cl'ur some swamp lan' fer Billy Thompson an' ter work hit on sheers."

Jason frowned:

"Don't like him," he remarked. "'Druther resk Archer. Ef yer fails on a crap Thompson 'll git niggers in yer place—he'll turn yer out shore."

Luke's face flushed and he leaped up and flung the trap aside.

"I dar's him!" he ejaculated breathlessly. "I dar's him ter do that thar, an' I dar's airy nigger ter rent ther lan'. No nigger shall work hit ef I he'ps ter cl'ur that lan'." He stood panting in his passion.

Jason laughed and dropped his hand heavily upon his nephew's broad back.

"I air wi' yer thar!" he said. "Ef hit sh'ud come ter anything o' that kind, yer Unk' Jason he air wi' yer."

Luke's passion was cooling and he looked about awkwardly. Jason sat down again and called to his niece.

"Come here, Parmeely," his voice was insinuatingly soft; "come here! Unk' Jason's got sump'n fer yer."

The child approached timidly, her face half hidden by her flapping sunbonnet.

"Whar is hit, Unk' Jason," she asked, "an' whut is hit when I gits hit?" Her previous experience warned her to expect very little.

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Jason put his hand slowly down into the pocket of his coat and smacked his thick lips.

"Hit air candy," he announced with unction, "rale, red-striped, sto'-bought candy—a whole stick un hit."

The child's eyes danced. In her eagerness she forgot conventionalities:

"Gie't here !" she gasped, snatching wolfishly.

Mrs. Binns stopped her washing to admonish her daughter.

"Manners !" she warned. "Whar's yer manners? Tell Unk' Jason thanky, Parmeely."

Recalled to herself, the girl flushed with shame.

"Th—thanky, Unk' Jason," she stammered.

But Jason had turned and was speaking again to the men.

"Tom Login air a-runnin' fer she'iff," he remarked carelessly.

"So I heerd," replied Jerry; "ther ole Cunnel have axed me ter vote fer 'im."

An angry glint shot from under Jason's contracted brows.

"Yer promussed 'im?"

"Not adzackly. Tole 'im I'd think erbout hit."

Jason took out his knife and whittled nervously at a stick, then he threw the stick away and shut the knife with a snap.

"Them Maysons thinks 'at they owns this yerth," he said bitterly. "They had ruther have a nigger long o' them 'an we-alls, yit they comes a-tellin' of we-alls how we is got ter vote! Jake Shaw he don't suit ther Maysons, *he* don't. Jake hain't erbove speakin' ef he meet a po' man in ther road, an' he don't favour no nigger crappers nuther."

Luke broke in apologetically.

"Billy Mayson hain't so bad," he said. "I was a-talkin' 'long o' him yistiddy. He 'lows, he does, 'at Tom Login was in his pappy's ridgiment back thar in time o' ther war an' 'at Tom Login fetched his pappy home atter ther Cap'n war kilt."

"Hit's a fac'," interpolated Mrs. Binns, "fer I war thar an' seed hit."

"I votes fer Shaw," continued Luke, "but Billy Mayson hain't so bad."

Mrs. Binns rinsed the suds from her arms and emptied the water from her tub.

"I wuz wi' Billy's mar when she died," she said; "an' I has knowed him befo' an' sence. Thar air a lot wuss folks 'an whut Billy Mayson is."

Jason winced, then he looked at his two scarred fingers and scowled, but he dared not antagonise his sister—at least, not openly. He rose and looked at Jerry.

"I counts yer fer Shaw," he said, and Jerry nodded. Then he went over to the clothesline and put a dollar into Mrs. Binns's hand.

"That thar air Shaw money," he whispered, winking at Jerry and Luke. "Now run an' git us some dinner. I air hongry."

At the well Luke turned to Long Jerry.

"Unk' Jason he do not keer much fer ther Maysons," he remarked.

"Naw," returned the other, "he do not."

"Seems ruther ter like Archer, though."

"Ruther."

Long Jerry lay back upon the damp boards that covered the well and shaded his eyes with his hat.

Foiled in his attempt at conversation, Luke returned to his labour on the trap.

"Paw he air gittin' mighty clost wi' his mouth,"



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he muttered. "Jes' now tellin' 'bout his trade wi' Thompson, too, an' he must er made hit away las' week! Anyhow, hit air a-gwine ter be good ter git off'n this blamed red hill. Thompson's lan' air good lan', an' ef paw warn't so dad-gummed easy——"

The sounds of snoring interrupted him, for Long Jerry Binns had gone to sleep again.



CHAPTER X

AN EPISODE IN AN ORCHARD

NOTWITHSTANDING the efforts of Jason Simpkins, Jake Shaw was not reëlected to the office of sheriff, and to make matters worse for Jason it was the Keowee vote which had defeated Shaw and had given to Login the victory. In shaping the forces which had assured this result Billy Mayson and his grandfather bore no small share. Login was a poor man, but the temper of his courage had been tried in troublous times and it had never been found wanting. Moreover, it was not in the heart of old John Mayson to forget the man who had followed a Mayson when the long, gray columns were marching, who had listened with a Mayson to the bugles calling from the pines, to the crackling roll of the musketry and to the roar of unlimbered guns, who had charged with a Mayson up a slope misty with cannon smoke and torn by bursting shell, and who at last had brought that Mayson home to a grave among his people. Because of these things John Mayson had bestirred himself, and Billy Mayson had argued and persuaded, and Tom Login had been elected sheriff.

But to Jason Simpkins it seemed that the Maysons had done him much injury—that they had laboured to break down his influence, and that they had opposed Shaw because Jason favoured him.

"They air a-tryin' to beat me down," he com-

plained bitterly. "A-tryin' ter make me take off my hat ter them jes' like thur niggers does. But some one er these days I'll squar' things wi' 'em—I'll do hit shore!"

And during all the winter nights, while the wind was howling round his lonely cabin and the rain was dashing against the windows, he would sit nursing his two lame fingers and rehearsing the story of his wrongs. Once, indeed, he had taken down the old "converted" musket which served him for a shotgun and had gone out and lain behind a hedge there watching the Keowee road. But when the Maysons had appeared—Billy Mayson and his grandfather, riding homeward together through the early dusk of a January day—his boasted courage had failed him and he had sneaked quietly away. So without further incident another year had come, and Billy Mayson was admitted to practise at the bar and knew nothing whatever of Jason Simpkin's broodings nor of his enmity.

In fact, Billy's mind was fully occupied with that which seemed to him a far more important matter, for he was a fully fledged lawyer now and had his way to make, and in order to do this it was necessary that he establish himself somewhere and open his office for business. In this matter remote localities were out of the question, since the "old place" and his grandfather had to be considered, and his choice lay simply between Keowee and Bellville. Keowee was the nearer of the two but Bellville was the "court-house town," and for this reason it was, in matters legal and political, the centre of interest for the county; here, too, the courts were held and the farmers were accustomed to gather. Manifestly, for his purposes, Bellville was the better town; and

when Billy broached the matter to John Mayson the old man decided at once in favour of the county seat.

"Your father's office was there, William," he said quite seriously, "and that fact should have its weight."

Such, too, was the Colonel's interest in the plan that next day he started in person for the town that he might gain a more accurate knowledge of the conditions existing there. He was not at all a demonstrative man, but in his heart he was proud of Billy, and with all the tenacity of his nature he held to his faith in the Mayson blood. In his partial imagination already he saw Billy in the rôle which once he himself had filled—a leader in the county affairs and the foremost man of the Keowee neighbourhood. But he realised that conditions had changed—that the leisurely ways of his day had ceased to be effective; therefore he was willing that Billy should take a place in the professional arena and there demonstrate to the world that the old strains had still to be reckoned with. Yet the boy must have a fair start, he thought, so he was on his way to Bellville to question his old comrades there and to smooth as far as he was able the path for his grandson's feet.

But except in his gratitude for his grandfather's kindness Billy did not care much for this painstaking work in advance. His school life had taught him far more of democracy than the older man had ever known, and he knew that in the end it must be by his own strength and out of his own resources that he must solve the difficult problem of professional success. As to minor matters, he could settle those well enough, he thought, after he



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had removed to the town. Left alone with an afternoon at his disposal, he took up his hat and strolled away to the Chambliss farm.

In some way, little by little, he had slipped quite easily back into his old place in the Chambliss household—a quasi position somewhere between that of an outsider and that of an inmate. It had never occurred to him that matters might not go on always in this way—that Annie had grown up as well as himself and that a time would surely come when their relations must be definitely settled. To him she was Annie—his playmate—a kindred spirit to whom he might voice his aspirations and his dreams: that was all, and for the present it was sufficient for both.

In the Chambliss orchard the apple-trees were in bloom that day, and Billy was met by their fragrance as he came to the end of the lane. Over in the green young wheat that filled the next field but one a partridge was calling lustily.

"Bob White!" he piped, full cheerily. "Bob! Bob White!" and hidden in the orchard clover his shy brown wife made him answer in a dropping note of liquid tenderness. Then a mocking-bird broke into song, mimicking the raucous blue-jays and the sparrows that breed in the hedges; then he made a song of his own—a song that tinkled like the running brooks and laughed as the south-wind laughs among little new-born leaves; and when he, too, had evoked an answering note, he swayed his supporting twig in his quivering ecstasy and sang a new song of love—love, the master-draught which Nature gives to make her children drunken.

"Love! Love! Love!" Billy Mayson halted, listening, then disdaining the gate, he placed his

hands on the fence and leaped over it into the clover. Gone was his lately acquired dignity, gone all the veneerings of books and of study, and there was left only the man, deep-chested and lusty, breathing in great gulping breaths the clean, sweet, odorous air, and striding half-leg deep through the lush and riotous growth.

"Come into the orchard, Annie! Come see the apple blossoms!"

The voice was full and strong—to the girl it seemed compelling. She was busy just then, but she pushed her work aside. Her mother looked at her and smiled, and there was something wistful in the smile.

"Bob White!" called the partridge. "Bob! Bob White!"

"Love!" sang the mocking-bird deliriously. "Love! Love! Love!"

"Come, Annie! Come! The apple-trees are beautiful!"

The girl pushed back her hair and stepped through a gap in the broken fence. Then she went to him across the breadths of the clover, her red lips parted in laughter and her white hands holding up her long, loose skirts.

"Billy!" she laughed. "Billy, you rascal! Don't you know how busy I am?"

"Busy!" he mocked. "Busy in the house! On such a day that is almost a sacrilege! Come with me, Annie; come out into God's big world!"

It seemed to him a big world then—a bigger and a better world than he had ever known before—and the girl seemed the very best part of it. A subtle meaning had crept into his tones and his voice was vibrant with feeling.



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The girl was thrilled, she scarcely knew how or why—only, Billy seemed good to look upon, standing there against the soft green background of the trees. She came up close to him, and as she stopped a drooping bough swung low and crowned her forehead with a curving spray of white, pink-hearted blossoms. A queen she might have been, but a perfect woman she surely was in all the tempting beauty of her fresh and unburdened youth—a woman whose eyes were all purity and whose figure was all curves and lissom grace. Almost unconsciously Billy put out his hands.

"Come!" he said.

To have saved her life she could not have refused: the air was too odorous, the sunlight too tender, the look in his eyes too deep. She held out her own hands and he took them. At her touch the blood surged into his face, then it receded, leaving him white and panting.

"Annie! Annie!" he gasped, drawing her close and slipping a tense arm about her shoulders. Her hair was blown against his cheek and his eyes were looking into hers. The girl struggled, but her strength was as nothing in his powerful grasp. Then her head dropped backward and her eyelids drooped.

"Billy! Billy Mayson! What is the matter with you, Billy?"

The words were almost in whispers and he smothered them with kisses. As he ceased, she lay for a moment against his arm, her eyes half closed, her face white and still. Then suddenly she thrust herself free.

Out of its fools' heaven his mind came back to earth and he stood before her self-condemned,

awkward and stammering. To her questioning eyes he tried, thickly, to answer.

"I—I—don't know! I——"

For a second the girl pitied him and was tempted to comfort him—his contrition was so evident; he was so big, so helpless, and so handsome. Reluctantly she summoned her wrath.

"You!" she said hotly. "You dared!"

Then without adequate reason a memory came to her suddenly—a memory of the old Bellville hotel—and her anger grew very real. Probably, she thought scornfully, probably he had kissed that woman, too!

"You coward, you!" she added bitterly, her eyes filling with tears.

The boy—for in this matter he was but a boy after all—started as if his face had been stung by a whiplash. Until now he had been struggling with his awkwardness—had been groping blindly and clumsily for words, but the epithet steadied him as nothing else could have done. The scarlet fled from his face, the light died from his eyes, his whole form grew tense but impassive.

"I admit it," he answered evenly. "I have no defense."

It was the Mayson pride—a pride that held the face steady whatever the hurt might be: but the girl did not understand. It seemed to her that he did not care. A danger-signal flamed into her eyes and then an interruption came.

"Oh, Joseph wuz an ole man, an ole man wuz he;
An' yit he marry Mary, 'way down in Gal-i-lee."

It was Julie Ann coming through the clover on her way from the road to the house. Her voice was full and rich and sweet, and the girl hesitated and

Billy's mind reverted to his childhood—to the time when he and Annie had built "playhouses," and when Julie Ann, singing her hymn-tunes, used to come and call them home.

"I am sorry, Annie——" he began.

"Sorry!" she repeated with a queer, high break in her voice.

Billy turned on his heel and went with bowed head back toward the lane. The girl watched him until he had crossed the fence and until Julie Ann had passed from sight, then she sat down by the tree-trunk and began to cry softly. The sunset was near at hand, the partridges had ceased to whistle, and the mocking-bird's song was hushed.

The next day she had a note from Billy Mayson—a note of formal apology to which she did not reply—but she did not see him again until long after he had established himself in Bellville and had grown busy with his professional work. But in the meantime she made friends with Witch Nancy, and when the old woman grew garrulous concerning the doings of her "boy" the girl did not interrupt nor show any signs of weariness. And the girl's mother, noticing how quiet she had become, looked at her curiously and wondered a little and sighed.



CHAPTER XI

THE SCHOOLMASTER

ON the green Kentucky hills—hills that were covered with blue grass and with blossoming clover—the sunlight was falling softly and was streaming in marvellous beauty across the old garden with its tangles of roses, across the old house in the midst of the garden and into its cobwebbed windows, across the white gravestones, and across the low, leaf-strewn mounds which those white stones were set to mark. On every hand, north and east and south and west, there were signs of life and of busy tenantry: it was on this one spot alone that solitude and wasteful neglect seemed to reign supreme.

In front of the house there was a road—a long road, travel-worn and dusty—leading away to the south, and not far away a little village stood, a simple little farm-town lying stretched in sprawling carelessness alongside the winding “pike.” At the nearer side of the village there were elm trees and a church, and beyond there were a blacksmith shop and a half-dozen country “stores.” From the dwellings which surrounded these the old house was barely visible, but at sunset a watcher might see, as he looked through the maze of the shrubbery, a red light on the shutterless windows which gleamed and flickered like flame.

To the simple villagers the ruin seemed a drear and gloomy spot, and in their ignorance they said

that the house was haunted—that in the daytime it might very well be that there was nothing there save crumbling walls and rats and bats and owls; but that when the still nights came, when the moon drove like a sailing ship among the cloud-islands of the sky and the rude winds ceased their clamourings and the rose gardens were asleep in the silvery light, then strange sights were visible; that back in the dark, still halls there came at times a glow of ghostly tapers, revealing the presence of a woman white-haired and stately, of a fair young bride in her wedding dress, and of a soldier clad in uniform. The little children who passed those grounds did so with speed, and there were many who should have been wiser who felt their heart-beats quicken when, as they journeyed by night, they saw the moonbeams glinting from the dusty window-panes.

Yet, for all its loneliness, the tumbledown building was harmless enough. Indeed, there were scores of living men who had once been guests within its walls and who were able to remember it as the fairest home in all the countryside. A widow had lived in it then—a widow, her sons and her foster son. Also there had been a girl, a ward left in the woman's charge by a relative who had died in the distant South. Later, the time of war had come and there had been a wedding, and the foster son had vanished suddenly and the brothers had marched away to the sound of drum and fife.

So much the villagers knew certainly; the remainder of the story they had woven from scattered ravellings of truth. Some said that the elder son had died in battle and that his foster brother was the man who had ruthlessly cut him down; some denied this; some hinted at even darker things.

But all knew that upon a day a very deep trouble had come the widow had presently bowed her head and had gone in bitter sorrow down to her grave, and that, like a stricken thing, the young wife soon had followed her.

It was months after these things had happened that the one remaining son came limping home again. Lee had long since surrendered, Johnston's troops had laid down their arms and had set to work, but this man had tarried for a season in the hill country of Tennessee, searching through all the woods and along the creeks and the lonely ravines that he might find the man called Croull.

Nevertheless, when many days had elapsed and his search had been unrewarded, he returned to the village, a bent and broken man who had grown old before his time. And since he was a proud man, and since he had known no other life, he established himself in the old house which his forbears had builded, and he essayed to farm his fields. The times, however, in Kentucky as elsewhere, were out of joint; moreover, there were old debts to pay and the farming did not prosper. As to the latter, no doubt the man was to blame. He had been sent while yet he was young to that finishing school of war in whose grim curriculum there are but few constructive arts. He had no power to gather up carefully the remnants of a fortune, no disposition to build up a new one. So in time the fields were sold—one by one as necessity pressed upon him—and afterward, when only his dwelling was left and his need of bread had become great, he had sought and had obtained a position as master of a country school. The school which he taught was housed in a log hut which stood under a sugar-maple tree at the

"crossing" some three miles and a half away, and for many years the man walked there each morning from his home. Thus little by little he came to be the "schoolmaster"—a gray man with a far-off, dreamy look in his eyes—whom people greeted daily with a smile which was half pity, half good-natured contempt.

Truth to tell, the schoolmaster was not a skilled instructor—certainly not as present-day teachers go. He was slow, he was "deficient in discipline"—so many of his patrons averred—and the village pedagogue, a younger man with all the 'ologies and 'isms at his finger's end, scarcely recognised him as a teacher at all; but the little children whom he taught were not critical, for they loved him.

Of his own affairs the schoolmaster was inclined to be reticent, but for a time the village gossips pointed him out to visitors and rehearsed the old tales which they had heard concerning the man and his house and his brother's violent death. Still, new interests arose, and these things grew stale with the passing years, so that the stories were half forgotten, and finally, as age and poverty and common-placeness crept upon the man, they were disbelieved entirely. After this he was only the "schoolmaster"—a little eccentric, even a little daft, perhaps—who lived in a queer old house and kept company o' nights with the rats and the ghosts. For the rest he had his violin, an old dog with rheumy eyes, and a decrepit Negro servant.

As for the house, it was in two rooms only that his occupancy made itself perceptible. In one of these was his bed, his other necessary furniture, and the portrait of a man; in the second, his candle, his table, his chair, and a litter of books and newspapers. In

the remaining rooms and in the halls the furniture was in orderly array, but it was dust-laden, and the floors were warped by the moisture from many leaks. Here and there, too, were dark stains where the little pools of rainwater had gathered and had dried, and everywhere the hangings and the bed-furnishings were falling apart from sheer age and rottenness.

Here he would come to rest and refresh himself when his daily task was over, and as the night came on and the west grew rosy with fading light and the stars began to shine he would take his battered violin from its place on the shelf and play to himself softly. And fancies would come to him then and his face would change, for a "spell" seemed to brood in the darkness and he conjured the past with his bow. Thus with his work and his walks and his violin the man's life was passing away quietly, and he was content that it should be so.

And yet, although he could not "discipline" little children, and was himself a "failure" and dwelt in such absolute calm, the schoolmaster had a heavy jaw underneath his grizzled beard, and there were those who had angered him in days aforetime who said that his wrath, once it were aroused, was terrible to behold. The assertion, however, had become merely a tradition, and was largely disbelieved. The schoolmaster assigned tasks to his pupils, bowed gravely as he passed through the village, and was in all respects as other country schoolmasters are.

But in that summer in which Billy Mayson opened a law office in Bellville the patrons of the "Crossing" school grew restless. It seemed to them that life was more and more losing its spice, and they cast

about diligently for some means whereby to attain variety. It was while they were in this mood that they held an election for a teacher at the school-house which stood beneath the big sugar-maple tree. Surely the schoolmaster was old and it was time to "make a change," otherwise the gray old fellow might come to believe that he owned the school at the "crossing."

The schoolmaster's lip quivered a little when his dismissal was brought to his notice, but he went away from the meeting to his own house in the midst of his own rose garden. There he penned an advertisement of three lines and sent it away, and thereafter he went daily to the post-office and opened with a certain eagerness the few letters that came to him. He seemed to be expecting something, and often after reading a letter closely he would throw it aside as if disappointed. One day, however, a letter came which seemed to be more satisfactory. The schoolmaster answered it promptly and received another in return. When he had read this he called for his servant.

"I am going to leave you, Isaac," he said. "You must remain. There will be the house to care for, and the dog, and—and—there are the graves, Isaac."

The old Negro stood for a moment fidgeting with his tremulous hands. As boy and as man he had served in the old house for nearly sixty years. A mere schoolteacher to others, this man was to him the master, the representative of the house and the heir of its ancient state. It was not his to question—he was too well bred for that; he could only wait, picturing in the meantime upon his mobile features his anxiety and his distress.

"'Bout yer close——?" he ventured presently. The schoolmaster arose.

"I will attend to arranging the clothes," he replied. "I am going to Carolina, Isaac, to teach. It will be spring before I come again."

Later, when the Negro was gone and the sun had risen higher, he noticed that the fall roses were blooming, and as he went for his last walk along the road he started suddenly as if something had frightened him, for the air bore the odour of the autumn woods and the chinkapin burrs were ripe.

Next day he took his leave of Isaac and the dog. Already his trunk and his violin had been despatched to the nearest railway station, and with his head erect he stepped out into the dusty road along which he had so often gone to the "crossing." But it was not of the crossing nor of the school there that he was thinking; rather he remembered a time much further removed—a starlit night, a quick farewell, a last long look at the women amid the blossoms, then the steady tramp of the man at his right as they strode on toward the South.

As he passed through the village the householders broke in upon his reverie. They were not an unkindly folk, and an old acquaintance was leaving them. The storekeepers pressed cigars upon him, the women came out to their gates to speed him upon his journey, the children eyed him curiously.

Afterward, when he had vanished from sight and the older folk had turned back to their work, a group of little girls gathered at play in the street. Above them was a great, old spreading elm, and



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from one of its branches a yellow leaf detached itself and floated tremulously down.

"Look!" cried one, catching at it and laughing.
"The end of the summer is come and the school-master has gone away!"



CHAPTER XII

ABRAM TAKES HASTY LEAVE

ABRAM's duties were not laborious. The red-brick office, with its one front room and one other in the rear, had to be swept and dusted, Archer's many papers were to be arranged each morning in orderly piles, and in winter there were fires to be made. But after these things were done, save that he was required to remain within call, Abram had leisure, and too much leisure is not good for the Negro. For your Negro is half a child; for a season he will sleep in the sun, afterward he must be given occupation, else he will set himself a task, and his undertakings are not always for the benefit of society.

Abram's particular diversion was to appropriate insignificant sums of his master's money and to skilfully cover, as he thought, the traces of his small peculations. But John Archer was a shrewd man—much more shrewd than Abram gave him credit for being—and oftentimes when the Negro deemed his master hoodwinked the white man was clearly aware of the theft and had already made a note of the proofs and had filed this carefully away.

For Archer was a man given to husbanding his resources and to guarding very carefully against the uncertainties of the future. The loss of a dime or a "quarter" or even of an occasional dollar was a little thing. A more timid man might have

grown afraid of a larger robbery, and a less forethoughted man would certainly have tired of the petty annoyance and so would have discharged the Negro or have flogged him or have sent him to jail. But Archer knew well enough that the plantation Negro does not steal largely; moreover, it was not a little thing to own a man body and soul as presently he might own Abram—these thefts put the power in his hands. Who could say that an occasion would not arise when the Negro might prove useful—as a witness, perhaps, or possibly as a defender. For as he grew older Archer was getting to be a nervous man, and although his was a retired, quiet life in which there seemed to enter no element of danger, yet it seemed to the money-lender that of late some imponderable menace hung over him—that sometimes a shadow stood at his elbow with its raised hand ready to strike, and that at night there were figures in his chamber—intangible figures that lurked in the dim corners and leered at him and gibbered as the idiots had been used to do. At such times it was good to feel that Abram was within call.

But Abram, knowing nothing of the depths of his master's knowledge nor of the workings of his master's mind, stood out on the street in the thin mist of the gloomy November day and watched the wagons that came laden with cotton into the muddy streets of Keowee. For in November Keowee rouses from its somnolent ease and for a season gives its attention to business. In this month the landholders come riding in to settle their accounts and the Negroes and the tenant-farmers come also to sell their crops and to "pay off" their "liens," and if by some fortunate chance a dollar

remains to them, to "do a little tradin' at ther sto'es." If there have been summer droughts, if the sunshine has proven a curse, and if rain in due season has not come to the thirsty earth, then this autumn gathering is very likely a sorrowful one, for the price of the cotton will not be sufficient even to satisfy the liens, and one may see standing on the street-corners thin, gaunt women, some with babes on their arms; and peering into the windows of the shops are the wistful faces of children—ragged, half-frightened children from the poorer farms back in the hills. All these are waiting for "pappy" to return—"pappy," who has gone to sell the cotton—and are hoping that in some providential way a few cents will remain to them. But alas! Too often "pappy" cannot even pay his debt and is forced to give his wagon or his old and bony mule to make the deficit good. So in the dim light of the sad, rainy evening the little party trudge wearily away, going slowly down the trampled street and out along the winding road, and presently pass out of sight into the dreary wastes of the bleak November hills. They have toiled, but there has been no reward.

But this year had not been a "bad" year and the scene was different. Their collections had been good, so the merchants went affably about, rubbing their fat hands and smiling. The women clustered about the counters of the shops and chattered with the salesmen, and these jostled the babies gaily and gave candy and sometimes an apple into the hands of the older children. The Negroes, clad in new shoes that squeaked in protest, and in homespuns and in gaudy calicoes, filled the air with bursts of vociferous laughter, while the landowners, instead



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of leaving the town at once, lingered in the streets, and gave, with an air of importance, directions as to this thing and that. In the meantime, the mist was growing heavier and little streams of yellow water were running in the wagon-ruts and pooling about the hoofs of the mules; but nothing could dampen the enthusiasm of the busy, bustling crowd.

"Heyo dar, Ab'm!" The wagons from the Mayson place were coming in—big, broad-tired wagons they were, with ten bales piled upon each and with six stout mules buckling down to the strain of the pull. "Heyo dar!" The drivers saluted Abram as they passed, sitting low in their leather-covered saddles and snapping their "black-snake" whips like volleying pistol-shots.

A homesick feeling came upon Abram—a feeling of profound dissatisfaction. He had his wages, it was true, and his perquisites and his occasional stealings, so that on the whole he was no doubt really better off than these hard-muscled sons of toil who were driving so steadily by; but presently "ole marster" would come out of Archer's office there and would stand yonder on the street-corner with his hands full of fluttering bills, and then the black line would file slowly by, each man receiving his due. After that would come the trading—an hour of carnival after a whole year's abstinence—and to-night at the cabins on the Mayson place there would be big pine-knot fires and a shuffling of many feet and great whoops of ringing laughter; and although the night would be chill and the dank mist would be settling down, the banjos would not cease to tinkle till past cock-crowing time. Why, already he could hear those Negroes humming "Hop Light, Ladies," and

"Good Times Comin' een de Clay Lan'," and the other tunes that he knew so well.

As for himself, he longed to join that crowd and felt that of right he belonged there. Was not he a "Mayson nigger"? But in a fit of extravagance his last month's wages had been spent for other things, and he could not rejoice with empty hands. Almost he was tempted to go into the office to "ole marster" and there hire himself for next year and beg a small "advance." An appeal to Archer he knew to be utterly hopeless—his past experience had taught him this—besides, Archer was displeased if he went away at night. Abram sat down on the office steps to consider. It seemed to him that he was very hardly used.

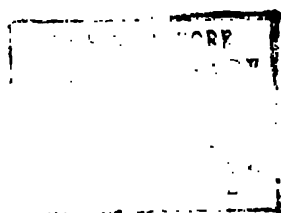
"Ef I wuz wukkin' fer Mars' Billy," he muttered to himself, "dar wudden't be no sort o' trouble. *He* ain't no short man! But dis yer Archer—dis yer picayunish man—got money an' 'feard ter spen' hit! Dat sort is trash! Dat's whut it is—jes' pore white trash! Huh!" Abram snorted in disgust.

During this time Archer was closeted with John Mayson and the blinds of the red-brick office were closely drawn. The drawn blinds darkened the room somewhat, but Archer did not mind that, since they shut out the glances of those who passed. Such glances made him nervous. The people of the town—people whom he knew—he could endure, but he had an aversion for strangers. Mr. Archer was a shy man, the townspeople said.

Just now, however, entirely oblivious of Abram and of Abram's cogitations, the money-lender was rummaging through his papers and was not entirely pleased. For period after period he had renewed the mortgage on the Mayson lands—had



“Very ostentatiously Archer looked into package after package, muttering all the while his comments.”





done so willingly, since under John Mayson's careful management the place was really increasing in value, and since the interest money had always been very promptly paid. Besides, in some vague way, ever since the mortgage had been drawn Archer had felt that the place was practically his—that the time would certainly come when, at small cost to himself, the old plantation would pass easily into his own possession, and because of this feeling he was anxious to retain the hold that he had established upon it. It was unreasonable to think that a man who was as old as John Mayson appeared to be could live a very great while longer, and the possibilities of a post mortem settlement appealed to Archer and tempted him. Therefore he had waited and had allowed the matter to drift easily along, and had treated the Maysons with a studied consideration and courtesy. True, the time had been long—much longer than Archer had at first expected—but John Archer was a patient man; no one knew better how to wait.

But to-day he felt thoroughly discouraged. He had just been preparing to renew the loan again, and it had seemed to him that this time must surely be the last—that the end was almost in sight. And now, without warning, John Mayson had come with the money to extinguish the debt. In the suddenness of his discomfiture Archer was almost stunned and was trying to gain time by pretending that the paper was mislaid. Very ostentatiously he looked into package after package, muttering all the while his comments. He had no definite reason for thus delaying the inevitable, but he was holding on blindly to the fancied advantage that the paper gave him and was seeking an opportunity to think

out and to formulate his plans. It was seldom that he found himself thus unprepared, nor would he have been so in this instance had he been at all able to comprehend the other man. He knew the careless extravagance of old John Mayson's class—knew that ordinarily the Colonel would not save one dollar of his limited income, and to Archer's mind it was not possible that a man should deny himself for the sake of those who might come after him. Even now he doubted the Colonel's story and believed in his heart that this money had come from some legacy or from some fortunate venture in the field of risky speculation. If he could just gain the time, he told himself, he could perhaps induce the old man to buy cotton "futures" in the hope of a further gain, or persuade him that it would be wise to lay this money out in improvements. A dozen such schemes flashed through his brain as he laboured hurriedly through the scattered piles of papers.

Presently, however, he ceased to look and swept the rubbish carelessly aside. "It is just as I thought, Colonel," he announced. "The paper is at Bellville—in a safety vault with others of mine."

"Yes?" queried the old man pleasantly.

"Yes; but there is plenty of time, you know. Mortgage doesn't fall due for two days yet. Just hold the sum in hand, if you wish, and I will send for the paper. Then, if you still have a mind, you can cancel it."

The Colonel smiled. For ten long years that paper had hung over his happiness like a dark and threatening cloud. Now he could see the stars shining through. A great thankfulness came into his heart and he felt at peace with all men. But it was too late to send the money back to Bellville—

back to the bank—and it was a very large sum to keep in the lonely old plantation house.

"I am getting old," he replied, "and may not easily be able to come again. Let me pay the money now and take your acknowledgment."

"Very well, Colonel." Archer saw that he had no choice in the matter and began to write an acknowledgment of receipt. The Colonel put the money down on his desk in the same neat packages in which he had taken it from the bank. On the top of these he placed a few loose bills.

"Ole Marster!" Abram's woolly head appeared in the door—"Ole Marster, ther waggins is done come an' ther niggers is a-waitin' on you."

Archer was having trouble with the receipt. First his pen proved a bad one, and when this defect was remedied he made a mistake in his writing and began all over again.

The Colonel started for the door. "Just send the acknowledgment, Mr. Archer—or mail it," he said as he went. "My Negroes are out here with some cotton."

Abram pulled off his hat as the old man went down the steps. "I hopes you is well, Ole Marster," he said.

"Very well, Abram; very well, thank you, indeed." He went on a few steps, then came back to drop a small coin into the Negro's palm. "I feel better, Abram—better than I have in a very long time," he added cheerfully.

Left thus alone, Archer finished writing the receipt and laid it upon the packages of bills; then he transferred the whole to the drawer of his desk—an action characteristic of the forethought of the man. Should burglars come and force the safe,

they, finding the usual moneys there, would most certainly overlook the desk. As he closed the drawer Abram glanced in at the door, but Archer gave the Negro little thought. Afterward, he took his hat and went out into the street, walking briskly until he had turned the corner of the nearest warehouse wall. Once out of Abram's sight, however, he promptly doubled back, taking a path behind the buildings and thus coming unobserved to the back room of his own office. He was apprehensive that John Mayson would come back and he wished the Negro to think that he had gone. He slept in this back room sometimes, and now he lay down upon a lounge to collect his thoughts and to review the situation at his leisure.

But out in front the crowd was passing through the swiftly gathering dusk of the drizzly day, and the wagons, now emptied of their loads, were filled with the homegoing Negroes. With a rattle of traces and the babbling of many voices the teams from the Mayson place swept by the office door.

"Heyo, Abram!" the Negroes called, "comin' out ter night, ain't yer? Mammy Clairsy sont yer word ter come. Said fer ter fetch her sump'n good!"

With his temptation strong upon him Abram thought of the packages of bills. He knew quite well where they were—they were in the lower right-hand drawer and the desk was often left unlocked. Yes, they were in there. He wondered if his master had counted them—if among so many it was possible that one would be missed. Surely to-day, when his fellows were rejoicing—to-day of all times—his master might have given him a present. He opened the door and, stepping in, closed it softly behind him.

It was quite dark within, for the blinds excluded the fast-failing outer light, but the Negro did not stop to light a lamp. As far as he knew there was no one to see or to hinder him, yet he preferred the darkness, and he went stealthily and on tiptoe. A few steps brought him to the wall, and he followed this with his hands outstretched until he reached the desk. There he stopped still and listened.

In the back room a clock was ticking loudly; from the outside there came the monotonous drip of the water from the eaves, and away off down the street a wagon was jolting and rattling along. With his heart beating fast the Negro stooped and tried the drawer. Then he slid it forward noiselessly and rustled the loose bills with his fingers—below these he felt the packages. The topmost bill felt a little odd, so he took two in order to be sure. Then he slipped the drawer back into place.

As he turned, a glare of light flared into his astonished eyes and he almost screamed. "I—I——!" he gasped and reeled back dizzily.

"A-a-h-h-h!" sneered his master, dropping the match and wrapping the room again in darkness. To Archer the time had seemed opportune for teaching Abram a lesson. Now as well as another occasion would serve to demonstrate to the Negro the extent of the white man's mastership and the advisability of obeying him implicitly.

"I didn——! I wuz jes——!" Abram was pleading in his shamefaced terror.

"Yes, 'you jes', and it isn't the first time either!"

There was a suavity in his master's tones which seemed to the Negro more terrible than any threat. He trembled in his fright. Twice he essayed to speak, but his dry throat refused him utterance.

What would his punishment be? Jail, no doubt, and after that the phosphate mines—the place from which if a man came back he was looked upon as one risen from the dead—the place of green scum and of slimy water, where men went down and down and down and presently slipped out of sight. A wild resolution seized him and he dashed recklessly for the nearest door.

"Stop!" yelled Archer, "stop, you blethering fool!" But throwing open the door with a crash the Negro gained the street and spurned it with his flying feet.

"Stop! Stop!" The money-lender's cry found echo in the mouths of the passersby and some took up the chase, but Abram bowed his black head upon his heaving breast and left them far behind.

"Stop! Stop, thief!" The cry had grown in volume, but the Negro was clearing the town. Far ahead, looming large through the mists and the darkness, were the forms of the friendly pines, and although his breath came thick, and the blood was roaring in his ears, and his footsteps were almost staggering, he ran on and on and on. His big muscles stood him in good stead now, and before he checked his gait Keowee had vanished from sight and he was far on the hillside road.

Then, feeling safe from immediate pursuit, the Negro turned into the fields, that he might take shelter in the dripping thickets and rest for a brief season outstretched on the sodden earth. After that he knew that he must go. To his mind it was clear that Archer had marked him for punishment and that to-morrow the constables would be hunting him in every Keowee cabin. But they would fail to find him, he told himself. To-night



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was his own—this dark, wet night when no officer would venture forth—and when to-morrow came——
Abram rose up hastily and with a long swinging stride pushed on across the crests of the hills.



CHAPTER XIII

AFTER THE TASK WAS DONE

SINCE the departure of Long Jerry Binns there had been no "renter" on the Mayson place, for to old John Mayson's mind to rent to a white man was a very bad policy indeed, while the renting of land to a Negro was an act of the sheerest folly.

"The whites are not satisfactory," he was accustomed to say, "for they are unreliable, while a Negro if left to himself hasn't enough judgment to make his rent and the landowner will have him to feed."

That he need not feed them, that he might be callous to the misery of these "renters" and might turn his head the other way, leaving them to suffer in full measure the results of their idleness, did not for one moment enter the old man's mind. He had lived upon his land for a long time and his tenants had once been his slaves. It had been theirs to labour, while for his part he had been used to plan for them and to provide for them and to satisfy their needs. And now, although the Negroes had long been freed and the conditions were vastly changed, the old rule held good on the Mayson place—the Negroes worked and "old marster" directed their labour; they harvested the cotton and he sold it and distributed the proceeds. Even their corn and the other food-supplies which they "raised" he kept under his own control, "rationing" them as they had need.

It was not an ideal plan and it was one open to many abuses, but in John Mayson's hands it was effective. When spring came and the next crop had to be made the Mayson Negroes had not, as was too often the case with the "hands" on the other plantations, spent all of their substance in riotous living. Money they had in moderation at "cotton sellin' time" and at Christmas with which to make merry, and "corn bread and bacon" and serviceable clothing they had at all times, but as for the rest "old marster" managed their affairs. Two or three of the men worked for fixed wages, the others were "share-croppers." If any one disobeyed the Colonel that one was from that moment no longer a tenant on the Mayson land.

It was therefore in accordance with his well-established custom that John Mayson upon leaving Archer's office proceeded to sell the cotton that was upon his wagons and to set aside for each labourer a certain portion of the proceeds. They would spend it foolishly he knew—foolishly and wastefully—but it was not in his heart to grudge them this merrymaking now that the harvest was closing and the end of the year's labour was at hand. So, as the afternoon drew to a close, he took his stand on the corner of the street and a hush fell on the babbling crowd, and the Negroes with a forced quietness that was fully belied by their eager features formed themselves into a line. This done, they filed slowly past and each man received his due.

Afterward, when his business was done and the cotton was unloaded and the Negroes had scattered to make their purchases, he loosed his old white horse from the hitching-rack where it awaited him, and, mounting, rode away homeward, a bent old

man whose white hair had grown thin and whose hands were shaking with the tremulous palsy of age.

Until now the very intensity of his purpose to free himself and his old place from the burden of a heavy debt had served to give him a kind of fictitious strength, and to-day the fulfilment of his desire had thrilled him momentarily with a sense of triumphant accomplishment; but when this was past and the inevitable reaction had come it seemed to him that the removal of the strain had caused him to relax and had left him worn out and broken and weak. And as he rode through the misty half-light of the evening, with the raw wind blowing gustily and with the muddy road stretching its brown length out across the bare hills and between the gloomy wastes of the pines, it was revealed to him with all the shock of a surprise that, be his past work what it might, for him there was no future—that, ill-done or well-done, his task had been finished, that the twilight was settling down, and that presently the night would come.

He shuddered a little as he thought of it. Many a time before he had looked upon death and he had faced it unshrinkingly, but in those days his work had been the principal thing in his mind, and dissolution simply a possibility—its occurrence an unfortunate incident. He had guarded as best he might against that possibility and had gone his way thinking no further about it. But now that which had been merely possible had come to be an absolute certainty, and death was the central fact about which all his ideas would be compelled to group themselves. On the muddy road, alone in the rain and the darkness, with the flying clouds above him and great looming shadows lying far-

stretched athwart the face of the land, the thing seemed terrible, and for just one moment the well-poised old man seemed about to become a coward. Then he recovered himself—was life so good a thing that he must cling to it as a frightened child clings to its nurse's fingers? He was by no means a learned man, nor was he at all versed in the current theological lore, but he was a merciful man, therefore his God was a merciful God—why should he be afraid? With an effort he put away his insistent questionings. He was ignorant, perhaps—ignorant and self-righteous—but it seemed to him that God would by no means cast him off utterly.

Then, from its baffled effort to explore the vague and uncertain future, his mind swept easily back to his past. And in the light of the things which had been and were not, how dim and unreal the present seemed, how like the phantasms of an uneasy dreaming slumber. Would that it were but a dream, he thought—all the turmoil, all the weariness, all the sorrow—and would that he might directly awake and find it so. In such an awakening he would not be old, and yonder across the ridges, where the old Mayson house stood "four-square" beneath the oaks and facing the wind that blew, his wife—the girl-wife whom he had buried so long ago—would be waiting and watching for him. And his boy, too, would be there.

His wife and his boy! How happy they had been in those old days, and what would he not give to-night to look again into her eyes and to kiss her while yonder wailing wind sobbed itself to sleep among the swaying branches of the great dark trees; and what would he not give for just one touch of the baby fingers that used to press his

own! Ah, this night! This cold, dark night, with its rain and its eerie shadows and its thoughts of the great unknown! It was more than a dream!

Hark! His horse had stopped suddenly and stood with pointed ears, nervous and quivering. A big form, black and indistinct in the darkness, swung out from the pines on his right and plunged across the road.

"Who goes there!" He had money upon him—money which belonged to the Negroes, and he had no mind to be robbed. His tones rang cold and stern, and his trembling old hand steadied and slid quickly to his hip.

But there was no clear answer. "Ole marster!" Did he really hear the ejaculation or was it some trick of the wind? Touching his horse, he rode onward. Far behind him he could hear the rattle of the wagons in which the Negroes were hurrying home, and he did not halt again until the gate of his own house was at hand.

Within, old Clairisy received him gladly and wearied him with her attentions.

"Is yer tired, marster? Yer looks tired. Yer mighty wet, too. Did yer see Ab'm up dar een town?" She kept up a running fire of remarks and questions as she brought him dry clothing and laid out his supper on the little table which she had drawn close to the fire.

When he had eaten and she had cleared the dishes away the old woman withdrew to the kitchen, and presently Witch Nancy came and kept her company. Down in the cabins the banjos were loudly strumming, and as she listened to them and to the voices uplifted in laughter old Nancy shook her head and swayed herself and groaned. Then

the wind grew wild and the rain came in dashes, and away off in the storm a dog began to howl.

"Dar!" exclaimed Mammy Clairsy, shivering and bending low above the dying fire. "Does yer hear dat, Sis' Nancy? Does yer hear dat, now?"

Old Nancy rose to her feet, her tall form still swaying and her eyes looking large and bright.

"Sing, niggers!" she apostrophised in a kind of rhythmic chant. "Fiddle an' pick an' sing an' dance! But dere's trouble—trouble comin' ter de Mayson place! Trouble done sowed een de Mayson lan'!" and cloaking her head in her long black shawl she opened the door and went out into the inclement night.

Left alone, John Mayson sat in his dark old chamber with no light save that which the fire shed and watched the bright flames leap in the chimney and the play of the shadows on the time-stained walls. It was good to be at home, he thought—good to sit by his fire and listen to the roar of the rain and the hoarse wild voice of the wind. And it was good, too, to hear the loud sounds of the mirth in the cabins and the echoes of the rollicking songs. All this was as it should be, he told himself, and he was glad that the Negroes were happy—glad that his foresight had made them so—glad that for these at least the world was brighter because of him.

And in thinking of all these things he grew very happy himself and tried, in his thin, cracked voice, to sing a short fragment of an old love song. Then as the night wore on the fire burned lower and lower, and the Negroes' songs grew soft and sad, and the shadows ceased to dance; and being weary, the old man leaned back in his worn armchair and fell into a dreamy doze. After that it seemed to him

that the winter was long since gone and that all the hills were green. And out by the garden fence, where for twenty years nothing but weeds had grown, the honeysuckles seemed to have sprung up again and all the air was fragrant with bloom. And as he sat there in the sunlight of the long afternoon his young wife came and held his hand in hers—and—and—he was tired—and—his head drooped against hers. . . . And he was falling asleep gently and peacefully.

Next morning they found him there. The fire had long since gone out and the ashes were cold and dead, but in his face there was peace—a great and abiding peace.

He had passed quite easily, the doctor said, for in his ripe age death had taken him as tenderly as a mother takes her tired child to rest upon her breast.

CHAPTER XIV

JOHN ARCHER GOES UPON A JOURNEY AND BILLY MAYSON BECOMES DISQUIETED

JOHN MAYSON had been four days dead, and John Archer sat on his horse at the creek-ford beyond which the road climbs the hill and leads past the Mayson place. It seemed to Archer that of late the Fates had been kind to him. Still, as matters had turned out, he did not feel quite sure of his position and he was undecided as to just what his next step should be. For Abram had disappeared and likewise a certain paper was missing from the lower right-hand drawer of his desk. Otherwise Archer would have felt that John Mayson's death had, so far as his own plans were concerned, saved the situation entirely.

The extent of Abram's knowledge was an unknown quantity to the money-lender. The Negro had been present—had passed in and out of the room once or twice—but it was entirely possible that he had seen nothing of the slightest importance; still Archer felt uneasy concerning him, especially since he had found that the paper also was gone. That paper in hostile hands would balk his plans effectually and might perhaps send him to the State penitentiary on a charge of attempted fraud. But if the Negro did not know the value of that which he had taken—if his getting hold of the receipt was merely the result of an accident—then the trouble was not so

great. In such case the most imminent danger was that Abram might carelessly throw the writing away, might leave it fluttering in the wind beside some country road where a chance passer might perhaps pick it up and examine it.

But what if that boy—that callow young fool of a lawyer—was already growing suspicious? The young fellow had been fully informed, no doubt, of all his grandfather's purposes, and, knowing certainly that the money had been taken from the bank, had perhaps looked for it and had not found it. Then he would, of course, be troubled and would search for some evidence that it had been paid, and very certainly he would not find that. What, then, was more natural, under such circumstances, than that the lawyer should employ Abram to pry into the affair, and that Abram, finding this paper in his employer's desk, had seized upon it and had taken it away to Bellville. For it was John Archer's habit to judge other men by the standard which he had set for himself, and he felt quite sure that, had he occupied Billy Mayson's place, such would have been his own plan.

As he thought over this, however, his heavy features lightened suddenly and he breathed a sigh of relief, for he remembered that the paper had been stolen on the same night that the old Colonel had died and that the lawyer could not possibly have known that the acknowledgment would be found wanting. So it seemed to Archer that all his trouble had come because of his own clumsiness in dealing with Abram—because of his own ill-considered haste in revealing too abruptly a knowledge of those petty thefts. For now that the old Colonel had gone where a summons-at-law could by no means reach him, it

was certain that the little transaction which had occurred five days ago behind the closed doors of the office in Keowee yonder was known to none excepting only himself and the Negro. And could he lay hands upon Abram, he might easily be able to control the Negro's tongue as absolutely as he did his own. What a fool he had been, to be sure, to go scaring the Negro away at the very time when he needed him most!

Still the case might not be a troublesome one after all. If the Negro had departed utterly from the Keowee country and had taken the paper with him, then there was nothing to fear; and if he was merely hiding it ought to be easy to communicate with him, for he would likely harbour about the Mayson place where his mother would be able to see him and to speak with him. So to-day he had ridden this way in order to see Mammy Clairsy and to assure her that Abram had no need to be afraid, that his master really wished him to return.

As for the mortgage, that was already past due and he had placed it for immediate foreclosure in his lawyer's hands. Failing to find Abram, it was his plan to go on a journey at once and to remain away until his attorney had "developed" the opposition. Then, if the receipt were forthcoming, he could upon his return yield the point gracefully and could explain that the action was a regrettable mistake due to an oversight and to his hurry in getting away. But if this evidence failed to appear—if there was heard only the usual vague mouthings—then the game had been won and the Mayson place was practically his own.

He was going to win, he thought. All his life a strange "luck" had been with him, and it had served

him so well, even in the days when he had been used to ride by night and had taken his living by force and had threaded with cunning stealth the long, dim trails of the Tennessee woods, that he had come to rely upon it. His heart grew light with this hope as he roused himself and went up the road to the house.

Having arrived there, he conducted his quest cautiously and called Mammy Clairsy out to the gate where the other Negroes might not hear; and when the old woman had averred that she knew nothing whatever of Abram's whereabouts, he disbelieved her and charged her with many messages to the missing man.

Then, his errand being accomplished, he turned his horse about and rode away for a little space and halted again and looked about him. What a grand old place it was even in the thin, pale light of a wintry afternoon, and how quiet and how peaceful everything seemed! This house suited him, he told himself—it suited him exactly, and if everything turned out as it should and the mortgage was duly foreclosed he would come here, perhaps, to live. Keowee was not an unpleasant town, but still there were a good many people there, and people were apt to pry and to talk and so might possibly breed trouble for a very silent man; besides, he had lived in Keowee for quite a long time now and it was not good that every one should know just where to look for him. Yes, he would come out here, bringing the things that were his—the safe and the desks and the papers and certain old weapons withal—and he would live here.

Then he turned his head and his eye rested on a stone wall that was built about some cedar trees

on the long slope of the hill that was over across the road—a gray, massive wall, lichen-covered and old, within whose boundaries John Mayson had lately been laid to rest. Beside the old man was his wife and his son, and about him, well sheltered by grassy mounds, were those other Maysons from whom he had received the land.

But the wall shut out all idle glances. Even in death the Maysons were reserved, and the world was not invited to read the epitaphs which were graven above them. So Archer saw only the wall, with creeping vines hanging from its top and with the dead leaves heaped about its foot, and he thought it an eyesore and was resolved that some day he would cause it to be removed. Afterward he rode slowly away to Bellville. Upon second thought it seemed to him just as well that he should go away at once. Too much lingering, too many inquiries as to the Negro, might excite the very suspicion which he wished so much to avoid. Let his lawyer make the first move and let Billy Mayson answer it. After that he would know better what to do.

The stars were shining when the money-lender reached the "court-house town," and the mail train was nearly due. He stabled his horse with instructions that next day it should be returned to Keowee, paid his attorney a brief visit, and then went down to the station. And as the train came in he turned up his overcoat collar, pulled his soft hat low over his eyes, and stepped across the railroad track to that side which remained in the shadow. Thence he watched the passengers file slowly out—first a woman with a child, then a "drummer," then—his heart leaped and fluttered and he gripped his hands

until his nails cut into his palms—a man whom he felt that he knew. The face of the stranger was peaceable and calm, but for Archer it held a menace that was terrible. Why, out of all humankind, had Fate sent this one to him. Ah, yes, he knew those eyes—brown eyes that could scorch and sear—and he needed no second look; but who could have foretold that they would come here to find him out. With a furtive look behind, the money-lender ran softly along the entire length of the train and stood in the shadow of the engine, shaken and trembling. Then as the cars rolled slowly out he caught at one of the vestibuled doors and swung himself lightly aboard. Then he crossed the platform at a bound and peered out on the other side. “A-a-h!” his sigh of relief was long, drawn-out and tremulous, for the man whom he was watching had crossed the street and was trudging away toward the square.

The train-porter, bustling about with a whisk-broom in his hand, saw Archer and called to him.

“Come inside, boss, an’ lemme bresh yer off!” he said, holding open the glass door of the rearward carriage.

Then the engine whistled a salute to the next street-crossing, the conductor came by with a lantern on his arm, and the money-lender entered the train.

Standing on the broad piazza of the old hotel, Billy Mayson watched the lights of that train as they slid slowly away into the darkness, and afterward listened to the echoes of its whistling as, miles in the distance, it blew for the country road-crossings—listened until the raucous sound grew mellow and then faint and finally could be heard no more. Then buttoning his overcoat and lighting

his short, black pipe, he crossed the yard and the square, skirted the court-house wall, and so came with reflective footsteps to the low line of brick offices which is drawn, single file, in the rear of the temple of justice. Upon the long veranda which is common to the offices he halted, then turning to that door which is farthest from the square he entered it. Once inside the room, having stirred the soft-coal fire into a semblance of a blaze, he removed his overcoat and sat down.

Contrary to Archer's opinion, he had as yet given the settlement of his grandfather's affairs no thought at all. He felt quite sure that the mortgage had been duly paid, for he had himself withdrawn the money from the bank and had sent it to Keowee, and he knew that on the day preceding his death the Colonel had received the package and had gone at once to Archer's office. So, knowing of no reason for any undue haste, Billy had on the day after the funeral simply locked the house and, placing Mammy Clairsy in charge, had come back to his office, hoping to lessen his keen sense of personal loss by a period of hard work over his books.

His industry since his advent into the realms of the law had been considerable, and by joining to his native ability a painstaking carefulness concerning the various small matters entrusted to him he had already begun to be favourably known among his fellow-craftsmen and had contrived to build up a practice which was spoken of as "very fair." And until his grandfather's death life as a whole had gone smoothly for Billy. His income, although not large, had proven sufficient for his moderate needs, and he had made friends among the people of the town; moreover, to compensate

him in some measure for his breach with Annie Chambliss, that acquaintance with Laura Gray which had begun so lightly in his college days had very easily been renewed. But really, though no one was more unconscious of the fact than Billy himself, the young man was gradually drifting away from many of his old conceptions and from much of his old belief. Not that the high ideals which had been held up to him from the days of his boyhood had vanished altogether, but they seemed to him to have grown vague and far-removed and tenuous—too subtle, somehow, and too sublimated for the hard workaday world in which he found himself—and he wondered whether it were worth while to follow them any further. It was well for him that in those days there were some things with which he could not dally—that truth-speaking and courage and clean-handed honour went to make up a Mayson, and that the Maysons were born with iron in their blood—else he might have made a failure of his life in its very beginning. Yet, such is the irony embedded in a man's nature, the very fact that Billy Mayson was no anemic weakling, no man to mope and to mewl, made this period of unsettled and shifting values a time of danger to himself—saving him from Scylla, his strength threw him near to Charybdis.

For Billy was disquieted because of Annie Chambliss. In his own subconsciousness he knew no doubt that he loved her; but he had not forgotten the episode of the orchard, and he doggedly refused to analyse his feelings toward her. And in the meantime, Laura, who fluttered about him and who monopolised him so prettily at all the Bellville "parties," was a very charming girl, and he would

have been less than a man had she been without influence upon him. How soft, he thought, was her hand as sometimes it lay confidingly upon his arm, and how subtly delicious were the little pats which half playfully, half tenderly she was accustomed to give him. That Laura had faults he knew—he was not so blind as to be unable to see them: shallow things appealed to her, and she was of the pleasant earth earthy, but she waltzed divinely for all that. And at times, when her plump little worldly body was snug within the curve of his arm and the stars were out in the sky, and the band was playing softly the last low strains of the dance, it seemed to Billy that he would be willing to continue so on and on through all eternity.

For they who dance in the night are apt to forget that the morning must surely come and that those things which seem small under the burning stars grow large in the light of the dawn. So Billy Mayson had gone his way, and the girl of the Chambliss farm—his little companion of the past—was coming more and more to be a kind of a shadow, a pretty memory, which had little to do with the present. And Laura, though not always a joy, was still a pretty woman—a woman who was willing to be won, he thought—and a woman who attracted him strongly.

The experience is not an exceptional one. The things at hand seem goodly; they are not the best things in the world, perhaps, but they are the best to be had just now, and youth is always impatient. "Let us eat . . . for to-morrow we die." That man is happy for whom, when this is his mood, circumstances assume control and force him to endure. Dame Nature, who sends the hot blood

headlong into his arteries, has after all but a single end in view. That accomplished, she cares no further. The individual must work out for himself the problem of lifelong happiness. Therefore it is well that a young man remember that after the stars are gone the cold, gray light of the morning comes, when things are seen as they are.

But the death of his grandfather had changed the current of Billy's thoughts and he had come here to his office in order to be alone. On the table at his elbow, among a litter of law-books, lay a single long-stemmed rose whose soft red petals lent a bit of pleasing colour to the dead yellow of its surroundings. Laura had sent him the flower just that afternoon, but it lay there neglected and forgotten while Billy fondled his old black pipe and watched the smoke-rings go floating to the ceiling. As for his thoughts, they were at the Mayson place, standing guard beside a rough stone wall.

But in the next room but one the lawyer whom Archer had employed was busy assorting his papers and looking up the law on mortgages. He was a shrewd-faced man of something more than middle age; he had a bald spot just in the top of his head, and his smooth-shaven double chin bore evidence of his good nature. Mere proximity had made him rather intimate with Billy Mayson, and the matter of this foreclosure was scarcely one to his liking. Archer, however, was a client whom he did not care to offend, and he felt that he must obey his instructions. Suddenly it occurred to him that he might see Billy Mayson and ascertain the younger man's point of view, so he arose and went to Billy's door and knocked.

"Come!" The voice had that muffled sound

which a man makes when he speaks with a pipe in his mouth.

"Taking it easy, eh?" Kyle drew himself a chair, filled his own pipe from Billy's tobacco-box, and rested his feet on the fender. Then he drew two or three puffs, spat into the back of the grate, and took his feet down again. "Had a man from your town in my office to-night," he remarked easily.

"From Keowee?" Billy's air was that of mechanical politeness; there was not the least interest in his tones.

"Yes—old man Archer. And, by the way, Mayson, he left a mortgage with me—a mortgage against your grandfather's estate. None of my business, of course, except to proceed—but I just thought I'd mention it."

Billy screwed up his forehead. "Thank you, Kyle," he said. "I sent the money for that paper to Keowee some days ago and I fancied it had been paid. My grandfather got the money the very day that he died. I'll look the matter up."

"Yes," assented Kyle affably, "I would if I were you. My instructions are to foreclose at once, but I'll hold off a day or two if you say so. Just thought I'd mention it, y' know."

Billy rose from his chair and walked back and forth uneasily.

"Kyle," he remarked, "you are as straight as a shingle and I know it, but I'm not so sure about your principal. Why this great hurry all at once? My grandfather's death has not hurt the land—it is still there just as it always has been. A month ago Archer was willing to renew that paper. Now, I sent that money down there and I haven't heard

from it, and Archer is making haste to foreclose. I'll tell you, the thing looks suspicious."

"Well," replied Kyle slowly, "I can't discount my client's case, y' know, and perhaps I oughtn't to have spoken of it at all. Guess you'll find the money in somebody's safe all right. I'll hold off a day or so while you investigate. Let me know in that time—will you?" He rose and went toward the door.

Billy laughed. "Oh, I'll go to Keowee to-morrow," he said. "Can't afford to lose all that money! See you to-morrow night and straighten the matter with you."

"All right!" answered Kyle, as he closed the door from the outside.

But Billy was sufficiently troubled not to sleep well that night, and on the next day when he arrived in Keowee he found the red-brick office closed and Archer gone no one knew whither. Later he went to the Mayson place and searched diligently for the receipt which he felt sure was hidden somewhere. Finally he called Mammy Clairisy.

"Yas, sir," the old woman replied to his anxious questioning. "Yas, sir, he went dar dat day. Big Adam he seed him dar an' he say dat my Ab'm call 'im out'n dat same Archer man's orfice—call him fer dem when dey want him ter come an' sell dey-all's cotton. An'—an'——" there came a tremor into the woman's voice and her wrinkled hands began to shake. "Mars' Billy, Ab'm's done gone!"

"Gone? Gone where, Mammy Clairisy?"

The poor old white-headed Negro put her tattered apron to her eyes and sobbed aloud in her misery.

"I do' know sir! Dat dar Archer he have been out yere—come yere yistiddy an' said I'se a-hidin' of de boy. I wish ter God dat I wuz a-hidin' him, Mars' Billy! I do so wish hit shore." She sat down on the steps and began slowly to dry her overflowing eyes.

"Sonny!" Billy turned to the well-remembered voice and beheld old Nancy standing behind him. "Sonny, dat Archer done *druv* Ab'm off. He done hit ter hide some devilment o' his'n, an' yer'll heer of dat some er dese days. Sonny," she leaned forward and rested her hand on Billy's arm, her voice sinking almost to a whisper, "dat man wuz *feered* Ab'm wuz here. Dat's howcome he come out here. He don't want ter find dat nigger; no, sir! He's a-hopin' ter his God dat Ab'm is done plum los'. Sonny, you min' whut I tell yer! You watch dat man—he have done some devilment shore!"

Billy thought that he could already divine what Archer had done, but he held his peace and tried to comfort Mammy Clairsey with promises that he would seek for Abram and would persuade him that he must come back. After the women were gone he tried to put together in his mind the scraps of evidence which he had obtained, and when he had finished the outlook was dark. The knowledge which he had arrived at warranted many suspicions and proved not one thing whatever. As a lawyer, he decided that the case was clearly against him, but he would fight the foreclosure, he thought. So much, at least, was due his grandfather, who had worked so long and so hard only to be cheated in the end! If the lawyer in Billy Mayson saw the hopelessness of the fight, the man in him saw only the righteousness of it, for he believed now that Archer

had certainly received the money and was wilfully withholding it.

His mind was distracted from these reflections by the appearance of a small black boy in the open door. "Howdy do, Ben Jim," said Billy, with an airy wave of the hand.

The urchin lifted his fragment of stiff plug hat with slow, old-fashioned dignity. "Missis Mary Chambliss," he announced with a sweeping bow, "persent her complerment an' reques' dat Mars' Billy Mayson come over ter her house fer he dinner."

Billy hesitated. Should he go and see Annie just one more time? It had been more than a year now—— But it would hurt Mammy Nancy so if he failed to eat of her providing, and what did Annie Chambliss care whether he came or not?

"I'm sorry, Ben Jim," he replied, "but I can't come to-day. I've got to hurry back to Bellville. Is Mrs. Chambliss well, and—and—is Miss Annie well, Ben Jim?"

The little Negro looked at Billy with something like scorn! "Mis' Annie right out dar," he remarked, "right out dar een de road—I rid yere ahint her."

Billy arose and went to the door. The girl, sitting still on her horse, seemed gazing far off across the hills; if she saw him she gave no sign. He stood for a moment looking at her—surely the right to speak the first word belonged to her—then he turned and went back into the house. "Tell Mrs. Chambliss that I thank her, Ben Jim," he said.

That night he went early to Kyle's office. "I can't find the money, old man," he said doggedly. "I believe it was paid, but I can't find any receipt. It looks like I stand to lose, and"—his voice grew

thick—"we've owned that land for nearly two hundred years."

Kyle, noticing his haggard look and his emotion, grew sorry for him.

"Couldn't you remortgage?" he asked. "I think I——"

Billy's temper flared up suddenly. "No," he replied, "I won't remortgage. I'm going to fight this thing. Archer got that money and I'm not going to pay him twice!"

Kyle elevated his eyebrows. "Oh, very well," he said.

Billy strode out of the office and instead of going to his own kept on across the square. As he drew near the old hotel he halted, considered a moment, and turned into the street leading north. A block farther on he came to a big white house set well back from the street and within a roomy yard. Out of the west the wind blew cold and crisp, and up above the stars sparkled like snapping icicles. At the gate he stopped again and shivered. The light from an open window streamed out across the clustering shrubbery and revealed an interior which appeared temptingly cheerful and warm.

Should he go in? For one moment his mind reverted to the impassive figure of Annie as she had sat in her saddle at his gate, then he swore at himself softly and hurriedly traversed the walk.

Laura met him at the door. "Why, come in, Mr. Mayson," she said impressively; "we have all been sympathising with you, and I am glad—so glad—to see you."

Inside the hall he laughed uneasily as he stopped to remove his overcoat. "I am selfish to-night,"

he remarked; "in fact, I am half sick with worry and I want you to make me forget it."

She came up close to him, arching her eyebrows prettily. "Can *I* make you forget it?" she asked, looking up into his face and then letting her lashes droop downward.

"I—I—think you can," he answered awkwardly. Then he laughed again and bent his face close to the great yellow waves of her hair. "I know that you can," he added in a murmur; "I have half forgotten already!"

She raised a white hand to her hair and, letting her head drop backward, looked out at him from her half-closed lashes and smiled. But in spite of his words he had not forgotten, and because his mind was on the Mayson place he failed to take the hint.

She shrugged her shoulders and shivered. "Let us go in to the fire," she said.



CHAPTER XV

THE PUNISHMENT WHICH FELL ON THE NEGRO

"AND he said that he couldn't come, Ben Jim?"

The girl, facing the crisp, frosty wind which brought out the colour in her cheeks, checked the long stride of her big bay horse so that the Negro boy on the lumbering, lurching plow-mule might come within speaking distance.

"Yas'm, dat's whut he said, Miss Annie. Said dat he hatter git back ter he office." Ben Jim removed his hat and bowed as well as the motion of the mule would allow—the courteous blood of five generations of house-servants had not been wasted in his veins.

"Very well."

Ben Jim understood the dismissal that was implied in the even tone of his mistress and dropped to the rear again. The girl brought her horse to a walk.

For a long time she had seen really nothing of Billy Mayson. Once or twice during her more recent visits to Bellville she had met him in the streets and had spoken to him gravely, and at his grandfather's funeral she had been silently present during the few moments in which Mrs. Chambliss, as became his nearest neighbour and an old-time friend, had held his hand. Annie remembered even now how the quick tears had leaped to his eyes at her mother's kindly touch—the one thing which

had seemed to move him—and how his dumb sorrow had appealed to her. Somehow she had known at that moment that Billy wanted her and that his one-time folly under the apple-trees held a meaning quite different from that which she had schooled herself to believe. The thought held for her a certain amount of comfort although she was angry with herself. She had her ideals—her conceptions of manhood and strength and old-fashioned honour—and it hurt her so when Billy seemed to fall below them.

To-day she was again troubled about him, for there had come to her from Bellville rumours that had disquieted her. How she longed just now for their old relations—for that mutual unreserve which had marked their childhood—so that she might talk to him freely and perhaps be of use to him. And it seemed to her that for the sake of the days of the past they might afford to forget some things that had happened in more recent times—might begin their fellowship anew—not just where it had been left off, of course, but a little before that, and thus by a judicious elision make whole again the interrupted thread of their intimacy. With this hope in view she had ridden with Ben Jim to the Mayson place determined to extend in person her mother's thoughtful invitation.

But when she had arrived at the old house an unwonted shyness had suddenly come upon her. What would Billy Mayson think of her coming to him in this manner? Would he dare to imagine that she—Annie Chambliss—had cared for him enough to hunt him up and to seek to find favour in his sight? Had not her impulsiveness cost her one false step already that she must be coming to

Billy Mayson's house in this way? So she had reasoned, and the hot blood had crimsoned her cheeks in angry shame. And afterward she had fenced herself about with dignity and had looked the other way when Billy came to the door. Women of the Chambliss blood could be as chill as ice did the circumstances seem to demand it.

In spite of her distress, however, she had continued to hope that her mother's invitation—an invitation sent because Mrs. Chambliss knew that the culinary arrangements at the Mayson place must of necessity be disarranged—would bring Billy once more to his accustomed place at the Chambliss fireside, to the womanly help and sympathy which her mother would so freely give him, and to the steadying influences of a conservative home such as his own had been. She had withheld herself from him—she understood that now—but she would make him what recompense she could. He had no mother, poor, headstrong, blundering Billy, but she would share hers with him if only he would let her.

And now he had refused to come to them even for one meal: that was so unlike Billy! How much better it would have been if he had never gone to Bellville. How very much better still if he had never grown up at all. For one moment her head drooped forward and a great sadness shone in her eyes. Then she caught herself sharply, straightened in her saddle and touched the shoulder of her horse. Her mother was busy at home: why not go on and help? The wind was too bracing for sadness and moping, and her horse was restless, and the broad road was hard with the frost.

So the girl took up the duty that lay nearest her

and rode away to look after those things which had been given into her charge. If she might not help Billy Mayson, at least she could lighten the burden which rested on her mother's shoulders. Besides, Billy was not all of life. The woods were yet there, and the brown fields and the pleasant stretches of the cornland by the sides of the little streams. And because she was busy the winter passed very swiftly and the spring began to draw near.

Then when the warm season opened there arose in the Keowee neighbourhood a very serious trouble, and Annie Chambliss and her mother found themselves caught in its toils. Primarily, the disturbance was due to that deep-rooted dislike which the "poor white" feels for the Negro, but the immediate occasion of it all was a disagreement concerning a "contract" between Billy Thompson, landowner, and the meek and lazy Long Jerry Binns.

True to his resolve, Long Jerry had left the Jester place and had cleared some fields on the land which belonged to Thompson—that is to say, Long Jerry "made the trade" and Luke and Mrs. Binns and Parmeely did the far greater share of the work. There was a strain of blood in Luke better than any which flowed in Long Jerry's veins, and being stimulated by his new surroundings and by his greater opportunity the young fellow really exerted himself during the year that followed the removal. But as small as the possessions of the Binns family were, it had taken time to get them transferred and arranged, and it had taken more time to make the new dwelling and its surroundings fit for human habitation; so Luke had by reason of these necessary delays been forced to begin his farming operations rather too late for the attainment of the best results.

In addition, too, the summer season had brought the almost inevitable drought, which fell hardest, of course, on those whose land had been but imperfectly prepared. Thus it happened that in the end Luke's expectations as to the product of his little, rough "new-ground" farm were by no means realised, and that because of this shortage Thompson was wroth. A more discerning man than the landowner might perhaps have sympathised with Luke and have encouraged him to try harder next time, and a more tender-hearted man would surely have been moved to pity at the sight of the worn, pathetic faces, the bent backs and the toil-hardened hands of Mrs. Binns and Parmeely.

But Thompson, a man of the new time, with a keen eye for "the main chance" and to whom money was the one great end of existence, saw none of these things. Long Jerry Binns and his "crowd" had not "made more'n half a crop," therefore Long Jerry Binns must go. Thompson did not tolerate such tenants.

In reality, the landowner's decision was exceedingly unfair. It is no small toil to remove the heavy timber from the southern "bottom lands," to break for the first time the hard-packed, virgin soil, to grub out the stumps and the interlacing roots, and to otherwise prepare for the planting; besides, the first year's return from "new-ground" fields is never of the very best: the third year is the real harvest time. Hence Luke and Long Jerry had a right to expect, now that the hardest work had been done, that they would be allowed to remain for those three years at least and thus be enabled to reap their just reward. So when Thompson had ordered them away even Long Jerry had for once

in his life shown a keen resentment, and Luke had given to the landowner that which Jason Simpkins called "a jinnywine cussin' out."

But all this had availed them nothing and the spring found the "Binns crowd" reestablished on the bare and desolate hills of the Jester place, and had it not been for the meddling of Jason Simpkins the ill feeling might have exhausted itself in words and matters have gone on as before.

To Jason, however, a disturbance was welcome just now. For years his dissatisfaction had been growing upon him, and now that a political defeat had been added to the list of his grievances he had become more than ever a preacher of forcible revolt against the existing conditions. Therefore the quarrel between Thompson and Long Jerry seemed to him a timely happening, for it had occurred to his scheming brain that he might use this incident to arouse the passions of his class and thus be enabled to accomplish some of the purposes which he had long held in view.

For there had grown up around Keowee many men younger than himself who, led by him in political affairs and sharing with him whatever spoils of money and of cheap whisky the victory might afford, had come to hang upon his words and to regard him in the light of a hero. They were very ignorant, and it was to these, of whom Luke was one, that Jason principally addressed himself.

"Thompson he have not treated Long Jerry right," he would repeat over and over again, "an' we white renters is got ter stan' tergether agin them niggers. Ef you-alls kin stan' hit, though, I reckon I kin. I don't rent lan' no mo'. But remember

this here, boys, ef hit's Long Jerry's time ter-day, ter-morrer hit may be yourn!"

It was his plan to work along the "line of least resistance." A blow aimed directly at the land-owners would surely be resented and violence to the white men would be met with similar violence. It did not seem to Jason that he should so conduct himself as to have the lean-faced, hard-muscled farmers seeking him with weapons in their hands.

But it was clear to his mind that the Negroes might safely be punished in such wise that henceforward they would not dare cultivate those fields which the white renters desired. If the small farmers were left unmolested and the attacks were confined to the larger plantations it was quite unlikely, indeed, that the better class of whites would in any considerable numbers resent personally the outrages perpetrated upon the members of the inferior race. As for the legal redress which would of course be sought, Jason did not greatly trouble himself about that. The officers of the law would be courting reelection next year and they would be apt to think twice before they antagonised the man who could "carry the Keowee box." Then, too, there were opportunities which Jason would by no means neglect at the times when jurors were "drawn." So Jason busied himself among the men of his kind and Luke followed in his footsteps and aided him.

"Bresh a few niggers," was their advice to all. "Bresh 'em good! Then when we-alls cl'urs a farm they 'ull keep th'ur black han's off'n hit! Yas, *sir*, we-alls kin straighten this yere thing ef we jest has enough o' grit ter do hit. But we has got ter work tergether shore!"

Unfortunately, the words fell on ears that were only too willing to hear. The hatred did not have to be kindled: it was already there; dull, it is true, but smoking and smouldering so that Jason's breath and that of Luke soon fanned it into an open flame. Stealthy meetings began to be held, a rude organisation was presently effected, and by force of hot words and much whisky Jason Simpkins shaped this organisation to serve his own purposes and to meet his own ends. The first blow, however, fell upon the Thompson Negroes—Luke took care of that.

It was a raw night in March when the lawless crew met for their first aggressive move in the "old field" above Thompson's house. The sky was partly overcast, and from the chill northeast dark, flying clouds came scudding into the light of the misty stars, while out in the opens the wind swept across the low rail fences and whipped viciously over the bare cotton-stalks and through the long and tangled grass. The rendezvous was hidden from the main-travelled road by a belt of leafless timber, and through the shadows of this came dark, slouching figures with heavy, unshaven jaws and narrow foreheads, riding silently toward a tall, dead pine which stood like a sentinel immediately in the centre of the field.

"Hallo!" The challenge was long, with a queer drawling inflection at its end. As it echoed down the wind it sounded almost like a wail.

"Hallo! Hallo!" The answer was short and sharp.

"That you thar, Jake?"

"Yep! Whar's Jonah?"

"Dunno. Who's that over thar by ther bresh-pile?"

"Wes Teddards. Kinder col' out here, ain't hit?"

The talk ran on in whispers. Some had dismounted and leaned with devil-may-care ease against the shoulders of their horses, some sat tense in their saddles, some moved about nervously. Presently Jason appeared and flat flasks began to circulate.

"Col', Luke? Try a ten-cent overcoat?" Luke was shivering with excitement and Wes Teddards had drawn near and was tendering him a bottle.

Luke snarled, showing his teeth almost as an animal would have done. "Naw! I don't want yer lick—I wants ter half skin them niggers!"

Jason uttered a low whistle. "Git ready, men," he commanded; "hit air nigh about moonrise, an' we-alls is got ter be a-movin'."

Masking slightly with handkerchiefs or with those bits of rag which served them as such, the unkempt crowd remounted and filed out into the road. Then as silently as specters they took up their march and rode on toward Thompson's.

As they filed past the corner of the yard a belated Negro spied them and ran with breathless speed toward the "big house" porch.

"Mars' Billy!" he called in quavering tones. "Wake up, Mars' Billy, please, sir! De patterollers is dun come here." Then he slipped away from the porch and around the garden fence and ran with all his might for the woods.

Straight on the dark line went and as it came to the "double-log" house at the edge of the "new-ground" fields it parted to the right and left and with no sound save that of the horses floundering through the muddy plowed land the house was quickly encircled.

"Men! Men!" Thompson came at a run, hatless and coatless. "What does this mean, men?"

A shadow disengaged itself from that line of shadows and a long-barrelled pistol gleamed in Thompson's face.

"Git!" said a hoarse voice in passionate earnestness. The line was closing in upon the cabin.

Next morning there was fear among the Negroes of the Keowee neighbourhood, for Sam Washin'ton—Sam, the Negro whom Thompson had employed in the place of Long Jerry Binns—had been taken from his house in the night time and had been cruelly beaten. Moreover, he had been ordered to leave Thompson, and poor, bruised Sam, who had never consciously harmed any one, was limping from plantation to plantation telling his pitiful story and seeking another home.

"Oh, it is nothing!" said the landowners to their frightened tenants. "That Washin'ton Negro has been misbehaving, no doubt, and has got himself into some trouble. You keep quiet and attend to your work. Nobody's goin' to hurt *you*!"

But during the next week another plantation was visited and then another and another. For after Luke had been avenged, this member of the band and that had old scores which they wished to pay off, and Jason, flushed with success and feeling sure of immunity, was growing far more bold. As a result the Negroes were terrorised. Some moved away, some went into hiding, and those who remained grew so timorous as to be almost useless. The larger farmers first, and after these the smaller ones, began to be seriously hampered.

Amid such widespread turmoil Annie and Mrs. Chambliss could not remain unaffected. Their ten-

ants, like those of their neighbours, were overawed and afraid, some had fled and the remainder were almost ready to flee. It really seemed probable that this year the crops could not be planted. But to Annie's mind the crop seemed the least of her troubles. The Negroes looked up to her and expected that she would protect them, and for almost the first time in her life the girl felt very helpless. What could a woman do in a time like this? Resistance on the part of the farm labourers meant for them a certain butchery, while meek submission spelled financial ruin for both the mistress and the men. The conditions had grown intolerable.

In the meantime Jason was planning a stroke in his own behalf. No one could better gauge the uncertain temper of the countryside than this same Jason Simpkins. It was in the very air that he breathed that long-suffering patience of the neighbourhood was drawing rapidly to an end. In another week, perhaps, matters would be brought to a head and grim white men—men whose business had been interrupted, and therefore dangerous men—would be out with breech-loading shotguns in their hands patrolling all the roads. Up to this point he had paid off the scores of others; now as a final act he meant to settle just one account of his own—after that he would "lie low" until this spasm of popular anger had fully exhausted itself. So the word was passed for the men to gather for one last ride over the hills.

It was cotton-planting time, and the fields lay ridged and brown in the pale white light of the moon as the mob set out for the Jester place in order to find Luke.

"He have not come ter-night," said Jason, "an'

we 'ull jes' go by thar an' git him. Oh, Luke's all right! Thar's no flunk in him an' he don't shoot no spent balls nuther."

But when they had reached the Jester place and one of the number had called Luke out, Jason's nephew failed him absolutely.

"I aint a-gwine ter bother them ole Mayson niggers," he said doggedly. "Billy Mayson he air my fr'en', an' I aint a-gwine ter hurt nothin' at all o' his'n!"

"Fr'en'!" snarled Jason, "a mighty nice fr'en' ter be shore! A fr'en' whut hardly thinks you is good enough ter black his boots fer him!"

But Luke was obdurate. "I aint a-gwine ter tetch them ole nigger wimmen!" he repeated obstinately; "I tells yer that onct fer all!" and amid a volley of sneering oaths he turned and went back to the house.

But Jason was not to be turned from his purpose by even Luke's defection. He had waited years for just this golden opportunity and no boy's whim had power to thwart him now. Out by lonely roads and along the most unfrequented paths he went, leading in silent column those who adhered to him, and as the moon went down and the dark, still hour of midnight came they surrounded the Mayson cabins.

"Keerful, boys!" admonished their leader, "Don't le's spile things ter-night. Thar's jest one here ter be tuk out—that's ole Clairsy; t'other wench—that dod-gasted, night-ramblin' witch—lives down yander next ter them pines."

"Is you dar, Sis Nancy?"

It was an hour later and the poor old women sat huddled in the deep shadows of the pine trees

which were in the rear of Nancy's cabin. Afraid even to return to their homes, they had crept off here in their pain and their bitter humiliation to hide themselves and to wait until the morning should come. Aunt Clairisy's voice was weak and tremulous. Never before in all her adult life had a stroke been laid upon her, and now after she was old her punishment had been great.

"I is here!" The witch-woman's garments were in shreds and little streams of blood flowed from the cuts in her back, but her tones were as steady as if her body had been strung with steel.

"I cain't stay here, Sis Nancy! I cain't stay whar I is been born, neither on this place whar I wuz raised up at. Dey tell me dat!"

The other woman made no sound, but old Clairisy mumbled wearily on.

"I gwine ter Miss Ma'y Cham'liss' house an' I gwine ter ax her won't she let me sleep over dar. Dem folks 'd be feard ter pester Miss Ma'y kase she is de quality." She was silent a moment; then suddenly she burst into a storm of weeping and held her quivering hands up toward the stars. "Ole marster!" she called piteously, "ole marster! How-come you done die, ole marster, an' lef' we-alls here!"

Then with an effort she controlled herself and sank back upon the ground. I gwine ter Mis' Cham'lis'," she repeated. "Is you gwine dar, Sis' Nancy?"

The witch-woman rose stiffly but with deliberation and pointed a bony finger toward the dim, blue outlines of the western woods.

"Hit war Jason Sim'kins!" she said in a low, tense tone; "hit wuz dat ar rogue, dat

ar white trash whut we cotch stealin' co'n fum
we-alls barn, an' 'fore God I'se got a chile yander!
No, sir! Sonny he ain' dead yit, an' I goes fum
here ter Bellville!"



CHAPTER XVI

THE SCHOOLMASTER'S VACATION TIME

TEN miles to the southeast of Bellville, and just on the brow of the hill above Little Stevens Creek, stands Lower Rehoboth Church, and almost within the shadow of the church there is a schoolhouse built of rough pine boards. The lands thereabout are fertile, but the neighbourhood is remote and the church has become the centre of the community. On Sundays the people meet there to discuss men and politics and policies. There, too, the month-old babes are baptised, the lovers keep tryst, the blue-eyed maidens are wedded. The burying ground also is there.

It was to this people, however, that the schoolmaster had written in his search for employment, and it was to this place that he had come to earn as best he might the pittance which would serve to sustain himself and Isaac and the dog.

In the main it was a lonely spot, but the man's life had been too long narrowed for him to feel keenly the straitness of his circumstances or the lack of interest of his surroundings; nevertheless from time to time, on Saturdays or Sundays or on holidays, he made little journeys to this place or to that. Sometimes he went to Bellville, once at least he visited Keowee.

For since his departure in the previous autumn from his home and the village he had been moved

with a mild surprise, for it had suddenly dawned upon him that he knew this Keowee—knew the oak trees and the well that was beneath them, and the long, winding roads which led out through the pines and across the white-oak ridges. For in the days of his youth—those long, pleasant days which now seemed to him to belong to another existence—a man trusted with some matter of business had come to Keowee from the little Kentucky village, bringing with him a motherless child. And it came to pass that one day the man was stricken down, and as he drew very near to his end he was troubled because of his little one. Therefore he had remembered a kinswoman of his own and had written to her urgently, and she had come to him bringing her own two boys and Ezra. And in the end the woman had taken the child and it had thriven and had grown, and it lay now beside her in the midst of the garden.

The schoolmaster remembered all this as he gazed upon the town on a chill and wintry afternoon, and straightway he felt impelled to turn aside and linger there. For somehow—so does memory mingle its threads in that queer fabric which the imagination weaves—even as he looked the presence of Ezra seemed imminent. The lost man was not in sight, of course, but it was if as he had just passed down the street or was waiting beyond the corner or perhaps had stepped into one of the offices. But when he had returned to his work the impression had passed and he had not thought of it again.

But although the town presently lost its importance in the schoolmaster's mind, he could not so forget Ezra. Once when he had been younger and when the sense of his wrong had been strong



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upon him he had sought for the man. He had longed to find Ezra then, had desired to clutch him by the throat and to kill him mercilessly as that other one had been killed in the depths of the Tennessee forest.

Later the keenness of this blood-lust had subsided and there had been left only the dull rankling of an anger unsatisfied. But now old memories had been revived and the smouldering fires of his hate caught up afresh and fiercely. Nevertheless, he wrought at his task faithfully, and presently the winter had passed and the time had come when he might go back to his own—back to the blue-grass country, back to his roses and his village, back to his own house and to his graves.

So, although Lower Rehoboth was pleased with him and had engaged him in advance for the next year, he was glad when he found himself seated in the train and saw the fields go gliding by, for he had grown a little homesick by this time—glad to watch the landscape blurred by the rapid motion and lying indistinct in the hazy atmosphere; glad to hearken to the whirring wheels and to drowse only to be awakened by the shriek of the labouring engine as it slid down the long grades and went hurrying across the levels.

Thus he came at noon on the second day to his station at the edge of a bare field and near a broad belt of woods, and he stepped off there. Then, when the train had gone and the black coal-smoke had drifted away into that vast infinity which men call distance, he bargained with a carter to transport his belongings, and afterward he took a rough staff in his hand and set out to journey on foot. And for awhile the road that he took was one newly

made and rough, but presently he reached its end and turned into another highway which led between green hedgerows and across many pleasant streams. And so he came back again to the village and the garden and the house.

It was evening when he arrived, the sunset was long since past, and the darkness had fallen like a curtain over all the broad face of the land. The dog met him at the steps, and presently Isaac also came, and the schoolmaster sat down quietly and rested his crossed hands on the top of his staff, while the Negro bustled about the rooms, brushing the accumulated dust from the furniture and preparing his master some food. Then, after they had eaten, the white man talked with the Negro, inquiring as to persons and things and telling of his own experiences. And when all this had been exhausted they laid plans for the coming summer with a sort of boyish zest, and Isaac confided to his master that he knew where a bee-tree stood. Truly it was well worth while to go away even if only for the purpose of coming back home again.

Later on, after Isaac had smoothed down the bed for at least the third time and had retired, the other man fumbled among the boxes which the carter had brought and drew out from its hidden place the old violin, stained with usage and mended in many places. The instrument was his friend: like a true friend, it was often silent—but to-night he had returned from a journey.

Slowly and almost reverently he took it from its case and divested it of its wrappings. Then with a practised hand he polished the wood with his handkerchief and tried the taut strings and drew the bow gently across them. And for a little space

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he sat very quiet in the flickering light of the fire which burned on the hearth, and his eyes were half closed and the strung wand held in his long, slender fingers touched the tense cords lightly, so that low, sweet whisperings arose and the shadows began to move. Then little by little the straying notes took shape and began to group themselves into a melody, and the schoolmaster opened his eyes and his head began to sway.

There was a hymn-tune first, and the simple air of a cradle-song such as tired mothers sing at the evening hour when their little ones are falling asleep. But there were long trills, too, and quavers in the instrument, and a volume of tremulous sound filled all the room and, creeping out at the windows, went floating away on the breeze. And the moonbeams lay on the roses and God's stars were out in the sky.

Then the player sighed, and presently he smiled at some time-worn fancy which the music had recalled to him. And his wrist turned deftly and the old violin began to laugh with a high and quavering laughter as the flying bow swept back and forth in an old Virginia reel. But after the laughter was past the melody grew tender and the echoes began to whisper and to sigh, and the schoolmaster, looking into the shadows, saw a face and felt the touch of a hand.

Then the player's mood changed suddenly, and faint and far away and mingled with the echoes of the southern pines the bugles began to blow. Thus he had heard them at nightfall bidding him go to his rest, and thus they had called him at morning from his dreams to the toil of war.

Calling him they had called also his brother,

until—until—— His hands clenched and a fierce light rose in his eyes and the bow grated harshly. Then a string snapped and the instrument was dumb.

The player rose with a start and shivered and dropped his head. Then for a space he paced the room restlessly, and when he had somewhat composed himself he went and stood at the window. Very quiet the broad road looked in the misty light of the late-risen moon, and the distant village, half shrouded in pearl-gray fog, seemed wrapped in untroubled slumber; but the peace of that outer world did not reach to the school-master's breast.

"Ezra!" he muttered grimly. "God help you, Ezra, that day when I meet with you!"

Presently he mastered himself and turned again to his room. Then he lighted a bit of candle and recased his violin. This done, he went to bed, but his spirit was stirred and that night he slept but little.

By the next day, however, he had become himself, and he took up as usual the little occupations and pleasures which served to fill his life. Sometimes he helped Isaac with the culture of the vegetables, sometimes he went to the village, stopping often by the wayside to talk with the farmers whom he met. Now and then one of his sometime pupils would come to visit him, braving the imaginary terrors of his dwelling that they might bring to him a bit of fruit or some pretty wildflower from the fields. In the afternoon he took long walks and at evening he rested in his garden.

And thus the time crept slowly by until another autumn sent him south again to his school.

CHAPTER XVII

BILLY FEELS MOVED TO THRASH JASON

THE death of his grandfather and the distasteful fact that the "old place" would, in spite of all his efforts, pass into the hands of a stranger, wrought a distinct reaction upon Billy Mayson's mental attitude. After his admission to practise at the bar and his advent into such society as Bellville was able to afford, the spirit of the people there—a spirit of keen commercialism, of striving after new things and after spectacular effects, of sneering irreverence, and of great surface activity—had in some degree become his own. And the new conditions which he found obtaining at the "court-house town," full as they were both of possibilities and of absurdities, had so dazzled and unsettled him that he had been perilously near to holding in contempt those slow and old-fashioned habits of thought in which he had been reared and which still prevailed in the homes of the Keowee country. The result had been a time of unrest, a period of deep dissatisfaction with himself in which his days of feverish hard work alternated spasmodically with days of unhealthful and unenjoyed folly.

The phenomenon was in its essence a symptom quite easy to read; it was the effort made by a nature impressionable but essentially strong to adjust itself to new surroundings and to harmonise with them. And just so long as those surroundings

seemed to Billy Mayson good and desirable the struggle was bound to go on, for the young man's conscious will and his subconscious trend of character were now things apart.

But when sorrow had come and adversity—an adversity blackened and embittered by a sense of injustice and of treacherous injury—had begun to threaten, all the manhood in Billy Mayson had stirred, and thenceforward (sometimes, indeed, angrily and without due reflection; sometimes hopelessly but always with a certain grim determination) he sought to shape his course, to master his own fate and to live up to his own ideals.

So, although his resentment had in no wise lessened, yet after his interview with Kyle he had held himself well in hand and had met evenly and without heat the slow legal moves which the lawyer had felt compelled to make toward the settlement of the mortgage. Apparently this resistance was hopeless and Billy felt it to be so, but it was not in him to submit tamely in this matter to Archer's evident wishes.

In the meantime it irritated him that he could not forget Annie Chambliss—that his mind would in spite of himself revert again and again to their talks with each other, to their excursions through the fields and the woods, and to that last scene under the apple-trees. Ah, sometimes when the partridges were whistling and the clover was in bloom he remembered that day too well, and in his dreams she came to him again and he looked into her eyes and felt the maddening touch of her wind-blown hair.

And yet for all of this he was a frequent visitor at the big white house of the Grays and Laura's



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companionship was growing more and more to be a necessary part of his existence. Masculine as he was in every fibre of his being, it was the woman in her that appealed to him and influenced him. How soothing he felt it to be after a long day of fret and of worry to get away in the evening to this quiet, well-appointed house and to forget himself and the world while Laura sang to him or scolded him or talked to him caressingly, according to his mood and hers. Still he was not satisfied.

Laura, on the other hand, was now quite content. It was good to have Billy come to her, to feel that she alone among women had the power to attract and to hold him, to meet him kindly at the door, and to thrill at the touch of his hand. And sometimes when he had been away or was perhaps setting out on a journey it would seem to her that all her petty ambitions and the plans she had made for her life might well be lost for him. But her better judgment was always at hand to condemn this impulsiveness. She was not ready to marry Billy Mayson, she told herself severely. The man was in difficulties financially, and in his profession his position was as yet an unknown quantity. It was better to wait, she thought.

And viewed from the standpoint of pure reason, her ideas were eminently correct. Life without the little luxuries and the "easements" which a moderate competence can bring is not a very attractive thing save in the verses of the poets. The "greenwood tree" may serve for a habitation so long as the weather is dry, but a stream of rainwater trickling down the spine will be apt to dampen the enthusiasm. "Bread and cheese and kisses" may please a fool—or a philosopher, for the extremes lie

close together—but average men and women need variety in their diet.

So the two went on playing with fire, half dreading yet half expecting to be burned, and living in that ill-defined borderland which lies between friendship and love: and while they were thus engaged John Archer came home again.

A very real fright had been Archer's on the night of his departure from Bellville, and many days had elapsed before he had been able to fully recover himself. In the first moment of his alarm he had thought of nothing save to get away. It seemed to him that the train went slowly and that it stopped too often and that there were useless delays at every sleepy little station. And when at midnight he had reached the State capital, he had not stopped according to his previous intention, but had hurried across the city, although the time was long past midnight, and had caught the northern-bound "vestibuled" of the great trunk-line of the "Southern." But even after he had reached New York and had covered his tracks cunningly he had still not felt secure and had thought of writing to Kyle, ordering the lawyer to convert all the property left with him into cash and to forward the proceeds quickly. For it had seemed to Archer that the whole broad land of America had suddenly grown unsafe for him, and it was in his mind to take some steamer and go to Australia or some other far-off country.

But after a season the inevitable reaction had come and the money-lender had in a measure regained confidence in his own shrewd wit and in his resources. When this had occurred it appeared to him that whatever the danger might

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once have been it was long since past, and that even if it were renewed he was able to defend himself. In Keowee, too, he was on familiar ground; there it would be hard for any man to take him unawares. So he had bought himself a weapon and had journeyed south again, and it might have fared ill with an enemy had Archer come upon him suddenly.

Still, a furtive look had come into his eyes, and after he had reached Keowee he remained whole days without stirring from his room, and when at last he ventured forth he avoided the side streets and looked sharply down those alleyways which he found himself forced to pass. And in the stress of his fear he scarcely thought of the Mayson place at all.

But gradually, as the winter wore away and no new alarm came to disturb him, he turned his mind to business again, and went to Kyle and instructed him to proceed with the matter of the mortgage at once, and much more vigorously than he had heretofore; for it was clear to Archer that Abram was no longer to be feared and that Billy Mayson was quite powerless to hinder.

Thus it happened when the middle of April had come that Billy was recalled from his round of petty business and his pleasant evenings with Laura to find that the battle for possession of the Mayson place had at last been joined in bitter earnest, and it was only by unusual exertions that the young man was able to postpone the settlement of the matter until the opening of the June term of the Bellville Circuit Court. But for Kyle's good-natured friendship he must have failed even in that effort.

It was a bright warm morning just after the

aforesaid postponement and Bellville was decidedly dull. Across the square a few idlers loitered about the doors of the stores, from somewhere in the dingy little street leading west a blacksmith's anvil was ringing, and in the young trees and on the little strip of sward in front of Billy Mayson's office a swarm of English sparrows chirped and scuffled and fought. Billy himself sat on the long veranda in front of the office, watching the sparrows and talking to Tom Login, the Sheriff.

The young man had heard, of course, those disquieting rumours which of late had been coming so frequently from Keowee—rumours of demoralised labour and of night-ridings and of cruel whippings—but so deeply had he been immersed in his own affairs that he had given these things but a momentary attention. But this morning he was entirely at leisure, and his friend the Sheriff had been repeating to him some of the stories. Really it seemed to Billy that the whole affair might be simply a shrewd political move arranged to annoy and discredit Login and possibly to bring about his defeat in the next election. For should Login arrest these lawbreakers they and their friends would certainly oppose him bitterly, while if he neglected such an obvious duty the landowners would be disappointed in him and would scarcely fail when the opportunity offered to vote for another man. Certainly it looks like one of Shaw's schemes, thought Billy, as the Sheriff rambled on.

"Billy Thompson's putty badly skeered," continued the latter, as he lowered one foot from the knife-scarred banisters and spat thoughtfully at a stone which lay some ten or twelve feet away. "He was up here yesterday complainin' mightily.

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He said that the crowd—some twenty or thirty are in it, accordin' to him—has been to his place twice an' that his niggers have been so badly frightened that the last one of them has left him. That's putty hard on Thompson if it's so, but when I questioned him a little, tryin' to find out who he s'picioned they was, I couldn't get a darned thing out of him—not one thing at all. Says that he's afraid they'll burn him out. Wants me to promise to go down there and stop them whippin's and still ain't willin' to swear out a warrant! What can a decent man do with such cattle as that to back him?"

He spat again, laughed sarcastically and took down the other foot.

"Anyway," he added, as he rose to go, "I'm going down there to-morrow and see what I can do. Politics or no politics, they can't ride over old Tom this way. I'll hurt somebody first!"

"I'm afraid, Tom," remarked Billy, "that somebody's trying to get you into trouble. I haven't kept my eyes open lately, so I'm not quite certain. But if you need me you know——"

The Sheriff ran his hand through a shock of red hair that was becoming tinged with gray, resettled his slouch hat and stepped out upon the walk.

"Oh, I can look out!" he replied. "But I know you, Billy—know the breed, my boy. Come over and see me some time." And with a flourish of his hand he limped slowly away—he had formed a habit of limping, he said, in the trenches around Petersburg. He was whistling now as he went, and Billy, listening, picked out the tune.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! For the bonnie blue flag hurrah!
Hurrah for the bonnie blue flag that bears the single star!"

"Good old fellow!" muttered the young man. "Wonder how he felt when the grand jury presented him for giving those fellows in jail too many good things to eat."

Finding no answer to his question, the young man rose, walked to the end of the veranda, yawned and walked back again. The sun was creeping up in the sky and the shadows that lay in the street were beginning perceptibly to shorten.

Presently a fat man seated in a rickety buggy came into sight, driving at a most deliberate pace. From the rear of the buggy the pole of a hand-seine protruded and the end of a long fishing-rod. The man was in his shirt-sleeves and his "pistol pocket" was bulging out suspiciously. The little boys in the street shrilled a greeting to the outfit and the man answered them hilariously. Opposite Billy he stopped.

"Come, go with me, Mayson," he called. "They're catchin' three-pound cats out on Saludy!"

Billy waved a salutation. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard," he quoted, "consider her ways and be wise!" Then he lounged out to the buggy and leaned over the wheel. "What's that?" he asked, tapping the fat man's hip pocket familiarly. "Fire-arms or fire-water?"

The Justice—he was a local Justice of the Peace, and when he was not otherwise engaged he construed the law in a dingy little office behind the livery-stable—winked knowingly. "That," he replied, touching the pocket in his turn, "is a comfort for all those who are spiritually minded. Come, get in!"

"No," replied Billy, laughing. "Honestly, I'd like to go, Judge, but I won't—thank you; I'm obliged to keep my office open to-day."

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"Heard about the Keowee trouble?" asked the Justice inconsequentially.

"Yes. Login has just been telling me of it. It's a shame, isn't it? Anything new?"

"Well, there's a rumour afloat that Cain was raised again last night. Can't say if it's true, however. A skedaddling Negro who was passing through here this morning told some of the boys on the square. He said that he came from the Chambliss place, I think."

Billy's face went suddenly white. "Chambliss place, Judge?" he queried, with a tremor in his voice.

"Yes, Chambliss place, I'm pretty sure. Say, what's the matter?"

For the young man had turned and was hurrying away.

At the question he looked back over his shoulder and answered hastily: "Nothing, only— Excuse me, won't you, Judge! I've got to go to Keowee right away."

"Well, by dad," said the fat man as he chirruped to his mule, "I seem to have startled him!"

But Billy was going hastily in search of a horse. That these men—this turbulent element which was disturbing the Keowee neighbourhood—would dare trouble the Chambliss farm or his own place had never occurred to him, and now that the unexpected had happened he was reproaching himself. Such men as those who were abusing the Negroes were not likely to be considerate when the feelings of women were concerned. White women would not be harmed, of course—such an event would lead very quickly to a lynching—but Mrs. Chambliss had been frightened, no doubt, and Annie

as well, and—Billy remembered this with shame for his own gross negligence—had his grandfather been alive this could not have occurred.

"I want a horse, Dobson," he said, stopping in front of a stable. "Give me a good one, please. I'm going down to Keowee to-day and—well—look for me back when you see me."

And when the horse was brought he rode away hastily and entered the Keowee road.

Outside the town the sun lay warm on the furrowed hillsides and a blue haze was in the air, and the pasture lands, where later the grass would grow tall and green and rank, were now covered with dainty field-flowers and lay stretched like the richest of carpeting across the breadths of the valleys and by the sides of the brawling streams. Riding down toward the creek, the young man noticed that on the outermost edge of the swamp the blackberry bushes were so full of bloom that they seemed like snow-white billows breaking into frothy spray against the nascent green of the brushwood which covered the deeper marsh. Naked and drear and chill the spot had seemed but a few short weeks before, but now the spring had come and the birds were whispering their secrets, and the trees, glorying in a wealth of new leaves, were covering the waters with dreamy half-lights and with shadows.

At the bridge under which the gliding stream rippled and gurgled and swirled Billy turned aside to allow his horse to drink, and afterward, when he had crossed and had come to the star-leaved sweet-gums at the foot of the hill just beyond, he saw descending toward him a black woman, tall and straight, whose gray hair was straggling from beneath her "head-hankercher" and whose clothing

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seemed soiled and torn. Little, indeed, at that distance and in that plight did she resemble one of the neat old women whom he had left at the Mayson place, yet there was about her a carriage and an air which seemed to him oddly familiar.

"Could it be——?" Almost instinctively he drew rein and waited. Then as she drew nearer he recognised her.

"Mammy?" he called sharply.

The woman stopped and passed her hand wearily across her eyes as if to clear them. Then a great light broke out in her tired face, for she thought that he had heard of her injury and was straightway coming to avenge her.

"Sonny!" she cried, in a tone of quavering gladness, "Sonny, I knowed—— God bless you, sonny, I'd die fer yer!" And meeting him as he dismounted she clung to his hands and wept.

Billy turned his face away. He understood now, and he did not have the heart to tell her that he had not known before. "Tell me all about it, mammy," he said, caressing her wrinkled hand. "I was worried, mammy. I did not think—but I will take care of you now!"

She stood silent for a moment and then she began to speak very softly. "Hit ain't much ter tell," she said. "Dey come ter we-alls place las' night an' dey drug us out—me an' Sis' Clairsy—an' dey whipped us. God knows whut fur, sonny!"

Billy's hands were clenched but his voice grew even and cool. "Can you tell me, mammy—do you know who any of those people are?"

At the question her eyes blazed with a sudden anger and her voice ran high and shrill.

"I knows!" she exclaimed, "I knows well enough

who fotch 'em dar, fer dat man whupped me wid his own dirty han's! Hit wuz Simpkins—dat 'ar same Jason Simpkins what we cotched a-stealin' de co'n. He wuz a-leadin' of 'em an' he whupped us wid his own han's."

"So!" said Billy. "Jason! My old friend Jason! Would to God I had been there last night!"

He threw down the light riding-switch that he carried and, stepping aside from the road, cut another, a long, supple hickory wand as thick at the butt as the end of a fleshy man's thumb. "Go on to Bellville, mammy," he continued. "Go there and rest till I come. As for me, I will go and see this Jason. Yet for a little while the Mayson lands still are my own, and by Heaven I will teach this fellow to know it!" And for a moment the hot blood surged violently into his face and all his features were convulsed.

Afterward, however, he commanded himself and watched old Nancy depart, and then rode silently on, for it was never a habit of the Maysons to spend much breath in words. And so he came at noon that day with wrathful eyes and a white drawn face to the log house of Jason Simpkins.

The "poor white" was tired and was resting on a log at the back of his house as the young man came up to his door. Dozing and half dreaming in the pleasant warmth of the sun, he felt utterly content, and in his repose he was cogitating and muttering to himself.

"Thar wuz two nights," he said, as he caressed his scarred and crooked fingers, "an' ther fus' night ther nigger 'oman—that wrinkled she-devil of a witch—she war ahead a right swart ways. Yas, so fur ahead that she could laugh at a white man's mis'ry.

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But atter awhile ther white man got up an' come agin—yas, Lord, he come; they allers *does* come—an' hit wuz *his* time ter laugh! Golly, how them ole huzzys screeched an' how hoppin' mad that Mayson'll be when he heers about all o' this! Ef I jest could git him—jest that one. . . .!" A footstep crunched harshly on the gravel, and springing up Jason saw with half-awake startled eyes that other one standing just before him—standing there with tense muscles, with an angry face and with a jaw hard-set and rigid. Before the newcomer could speak the "poor white" was stammering out a lie.

"Mr. Mayson, I warn't thar—I'll swar I warn't! They is lies been tole you on me. I heerd about hit, but I never went a-nigh thar." His voice had a cringing tone and his body writhed in the abjectness of his fear.

A wave of disgust swept over Billy and sickened him. How could he strike a man who behaved like this!

"For God's sake, straighten yourself and be a man!" he ejaculated. "You went to my place. You beat two helpless and aged women—— No, don't trouble to lie to me about it—and, damn me, I can't hit you, sir, because you are not man enough to fight!"

Jason's voice trailed off into a snarling whine. "I don't want no fuss wi' you, Billy Mayson, an' you come here ter raise a row. I ain't done nothin'."

"Will you defend yourself," asked Billy impatiently, "or must I flog you as you stand?"

Jason had been backing away from his opponent and his foot struck lightly against a stone. At the touch he stooped, then rose like a flash and hurled the missile full at Billy's head. But in his haste he

missed his aim, and in the next moment he turned and ran with all his speed, bearing across his face a great red welt where Billy's switch had fallen.

The young man did not follow the fugitive, but laughed shortly, stood for a moment watching, and then went slowly back to his horse. It seemed to him that he had done too little—or too much—and that the advantage still lay with the "poor white." Then, as the picture of those two bruised old women who loved and trusted him came back to his mind his anger grew hot again.

"Next time I will kill you, Jason," he apostrophised—"kill you as I would a dog!"

But Jason, hidden in the red sumac bushes on the hillside above the road, nursed a smarting face and watched Billy ride away.

"Seems like he thinks I is no better 'an his dorg!" he said with an oath. "But my time is gwine ter come yit! My time'll come yit, my bully boy!"

Then he made a quick detour about the crest of the hill, and as the coast seemed clear he struck out across the fields, coming into the highway finally at a point below the Jester place, and there after a moment of waiting he met Long Jerry Binns, whom earlier in the day he had despatched to Keowee.

"Jason," remarked this leisurely man, "you-all has jest played thunder. Keowee is hot all over sence las' night an' war'nts is out fer nigh about ther las' man of yer. They say 'at Tom Login 'ull be down ter-morrer, an' ef he comes he 'ull shore hunt fer you. I'd leave ef I wuz in yore place."

"Long Jerry," queried Jason, ignoring the well-meant advice, "who swore out them war'nts?"

Long Jerry groaned in the heaviness of his spirit. "I dunno rightly," he replied. "That thar Cham'liss

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gal rid inter town this mornin' an' fotch ole Clairisy, an' thar wuz a right smart racket an' then ther war'nts wuz fixed. I is done tole Luke an' Luke he air a-lyin' low. I'd hide out ef I wuz you, Jason. They wants you the wust of all."

"Allers a-crowdin' o' me!" snarled Jason. "Whut's them Cham'lisses got ter do with hit, I'd like ter know. Durn 'em, we'll tetch *them* up! Naw, I aint a-gwine nowhars! Let 'em 'rest me ef they wants to! They cant prove nothin' on me."

"Luke," returned Long Jerry sententiously, "air not so shore. He 'lows 'at he's gwine ter hide. He didn't much want ter stay in this neighbourhood, but his mammy overpersuaded him. But he have natchully tuk ter ther bresh."

"I is a-gwine ter stan' trile," repeated Jason. "Griggs an' Shaw'll hatter take keer of me."

They parted, Jerry Binns taking his slow way homeward and Jason turning again to the fields; but late that night, with matches and "fat" heart-pine in his hands, the latter crept stealthily up to the fence by the high road that lies in front of the Chambliss house. Covered by the heavy shadows he lay very close and listened. Then away off down the hill he heard the sound of a hoof and he crouched lower with every nerve on the stretch.

Steadily the horse came on until it was opposite the Chambliss lane, but there it stopped suddenly and threw its ears forward and snorted. Then, as the rider thrust his gun-muzzle up, Jason saw a movement in the shadows of the lane and a glint as of moonlight on metal.

"Hallo!" called the horseman sharply.

A gun-lock clicked in the lane. "Who's that?" came the answer from the darkness.

"Briggs—lookin' out for raiders. Who are you?"

"Mayson—same business. All right, Briggs!"

The man rode on and Jason lay shivering with a nervous chill. Death lay there across the road yawning for such as he. Trying to soften even his heart-beats, he wormed his way painfully along the bush-covered fence until he had passed the crest of the hill and then he arose and slid silently away through the darkness.

And neither Annie who was asleep in the house nor Billy who dozed as he patrolled the road between the Chambliss place and his own had any idea of the mischief which Billy had prevented.

CHAPTER XVIII

ARCHER GAINS THAT WHICH HE COVETS

DURING the month that followed Billy Mayson's night of watchfulness the Keowee neighbourhood was stirred to its depths. Conservative and slow to anger as its people were, yet there was a limit to their forbearance, and past that limit a wise man would not go. Even more suddenly than Jason had anticipated, the anger of his neighbours had blazed up, and for a week thereafter there were pickets on all the roads—squads of hard-faced, determined men headed by those graybeards who had ridden behind Hampton in the '60s and who had followed him again in '76. And so fierce was this outbreak of feeling that Login postponed for a season the serving of his warrants lest his prisoners be taken from him and mobbed.

Not, indeed, that the Keowee men cared over-much for the Negroes—the black man does not appeal to them greatly—but your Southerner is proud of his land and is jealous of the privileges which attach thereto. His house may be but a hut and his freehold but a few barren acres, but in that hut and upon those acres he feels himself master, and he will strike with no uncertain hand at any man who assails his sovereignty there. Moreover, the farms must be tilled.

The night-riders, however, were frightened and had no thought of creating other disturbances; so

the storm which they had raised spent itself in mutterings, and gradually the men of the better class dispersed, content to let the law take its course. Then, when quiet had been restored and the cooler heads among the populace had regained their accustomed control, the Sheriff came and took Jason, together with many of those who had aided him, away to the Bellville jail.

Many of the raiders, trusting in Jason's assurance that his "eenfluence" and his political "pull" would be sufficient to "clear" them, made no attempt to escape, but Luke had to a very considerable extent lost confidence in his uncle and now he stubbornly rejected that advice which Jason by means of Long Jerry had several times conveyed to him.

"I ain't a-gwine ter no jail!" had been his sullen answer. "Unk' Jason he don't know. He 'lowed 'at we war'n't gwine ter be 'rested, nur tied up in jail, nur tried. Now he have played ther wile an' have got hisse'f cotched, an' he wants me ter come 'long wi' him. But I ain't never a-gwine. Not ef I knows myse'f. Keewee swamps is might' nigh good ernough fer me!"

True to his resolve, he eluded Login and foiled all efforts at capture, lying hidden sometimes in the woods and ravines of the Jester place, sometimes in the tangled creek-swamps, sometimes in the heavy cane that skirts the muddy banks of the river. And under cover of the night Mrs. Binns, with only Parmeely for company, would creep by hidden paths to take to him the scant food which she herself should have eaten and to look into his face, for he was her first-born and she loved him.

And while Luke was stealing from hiding-place to hiding-place, and while those of his associates who

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had not yet been suspected were trembling lest information might be lodged against them, the June court came on. Login was busy during the first week of the session, for the cases on the criminal docket were being tried—one charge of murder, two of assault and a half-dozen of petty theft; but Billy, beyond saving one rat-faced white man from the punishment consequent upon sheep-stealing, had little to do except to await the next week and that loss of the Mayson place which it would almost surely bring. As for Jason and his friends, they were well satisfied. Griggs and Shaw had already brought pressure to bear on the solicitor who represented the State, and that official, not at all anxious for political martyrdom, had assured them that their wishes would be respected. So when Samuel Johnson, Esq., one of the shrewdest attorneys of the Bellville Bar and by virtue of a liberal fee now "counsel" for "Jason Simpkins *et al.*" rose on Saturday to urge a postponement of the case and to ask that his clients be admitted to "bail," the State's attorney offered no objection and the matter was concluded at once. Then after "lickerin' up" at Shaw's expense and shaking Johnson's hand effusively, the worthless crew set out for their homes, very happy to be free again.

But the landowners of the Keowee country were far from being pleased with the fox-like solicitor's pliant action. They had been disturbed and their farming operations had been interfered with; such interferences in the midst of a busy season were apt to cause the loss of a crop, and even a partial failure of the cotton meant bankruptcy for many of them. It had only been by the most strenuous efforts that they had been able to calm the Negroes and to set

them steadily at work again, therefore they thought that Jason and his riotous fellows should be very summarily punished. But it was evident that the State's attorney was not at all anxious to bring the case to trial either now or hereafter, and it was more than probable that at the next term he would merely repeat in October this inaction which had marked him in June.

It was because of these things that Larkin of the "river plantations," Perry from the "Half-way" and Tony Wilkerson from "over the creek," together with some nine or ten others, held an informal consultation in Login's office immediately after Jason's bond had been filed. Perry, a big bluff man with brown side whiskers and a very red face, took a seat on the window-sill and expressed his opinion at once.

"We've just got to do something," he said. "Any one can see how matters are going now. Bowers is a pretty fair sort of fellow on the whole, but next year is election year and Bowers has his ear to the ground. If some one doesn't push it, this matter will be put off again and again until it is stale, and then, after public interest has waned and the witnesses are scattered, it will simply be quietly dropped. I take it that none of us are children and that we all know how such things are 'worked.' "

A murmur of assent ran through the crowd.

"Go on, Perry," said Wilkerson quietly.

"Well, I don't want to seem officious, but it is my idea that we men who are interested must get together at once and must employ a lawyer to work up this case against that Simpkins gang and see that it comes to trial."

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Larkin, from his seat by the door, rubbed his palms and nodded his gray head vigorously. "That's the plan!" he remarked. "If those fellows are not taught a lesson they'll be up to some other devilment soon! Now, I for one don't propose to stand anything more from such cattle. I'm ready to fight this thing out right now!"

"We are with you!" said Wilkerson. "Gentlemen, are we agreed?"

"This will cost us a little money, you know," added Larkin quietly.

One man stepped through the door rather hastily, two or three searched fumblingly for their pocket-books, the others merely nodded or expressed their assent in a single word.

"That is sufficient!" broke in Perry. "That is what I wanted to know. Now, how about the lawyer—what attorney shall we employ?"

"How about Griggs?" inquired a timid-looking man who stood with his back to the wall.

Larkin laughed. "Mounts," he replied, "your Senator wouldn't touch this end of that case—no, not for the price of your whole plantation!"

"Half of them lawyers is in polertics er else they is tryin' ter git thar," grumbled a coarse-looking man in jean trousers.

"Griggs!" laughed Wilkerson. "Griggs and Shaw are as thick as thieves and Shaw is backing our good friend Jason!"

The timid man was covered with confusion and a silence fell upon the assemblage.

"Why not try Kyle?" asked Perry at last, but the suggestion did not appear to find favour.

"Office lawyer!"

"Too slow for a case like this!"

"Good man in a civil suit, but——"

So the comments ran on.

Suddenly Larkin rose. "I know a man," he interrupted, "who will fight this case to the bitter end. He knows just how we feel, too, for he has had trouble with that crowd himself. He's a young fellow—hasn't much experience—but he is 'straight goods' and is as wide-awake and as plucky as they make 'em. How about Mayson, gentlemen—young Billy Mayson from Keowee?"

Login had entered the office and was leaning over a desk and listening. "Men," he remarked earnestly, "Billy Mayson is the man you want. I'd bet my last dollar on him!"

"So would I!" agreed Larkin with emphasis.

A shadow of disappointment seemed to flit over Perry's face but it was gone in an instant. "Let it be Mayson, then." He smiled and raised his hand. "And so say we all!"

So the matter was ended, and Larkin went at once to find Billy and to acquaint him with their decision.

But Billy, disgusted by the easy manner in which Jason had apparently escaped, had closed his office for the afternoon and had gone to his room in the quiet second story of the old hotel. So Larkin, going home in the meantime, did not see him until Tuesday of the following week. The civil cases were then being tried, and when the farmer came to the court-house steps the cause of "Archer *vs.* The Mayson Estate" had just been ended.

"Well, Billy Mayson lost his plantation," announced the Sheriff, coming down the stone steps to where Larkin stood leaning against the iron railing which bounded them. "I tell you, Larkin,

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I'm sorry for the lad ! He showed up rather badly, too—just between you and I."

"How so?" asked Larkin with interest.

"We-e-l-l, lost his temper while Archer was testifying. And afterward when they met out here on the square they had another quarrel. Billy threatened Archer, I hear. Altogether, it wasn't like Billy. Usually he's cool enough."

"Archer's a cool one, too," remarked Larkin.

"Yes; and Archer had the best of this affair, certainly. But I'm sorry for the lad. By the way, I told him that you folks wanted him to prosecute the Simpkins crowd."

"All right!" Larkin turned away and went toward Billy's office.

Meanwhile, the young lawyer, left to himself, as angry men are apt to be, had been experiencing a bad half-hour. It was plain to him now that his opponent had baited him into a rage with a deliberate purpose in view, that to-morrow it would be said in Keowee that Archer was a forbearing and a patient man, and that Billy Mayson, unwilling to pay a debt, had subjected the money-lender to an unprovoked and violent assault. What a fool he had been in his anger ! How like the vain mouthings of a child his many bitter words had been !

And his grandfather ! Yes, that self-contained old man would have been ashamed of him to-day could he have heard his grandson's voice as that grandson stood there calling Archer liar and thief and warning him that a certain retribution would come.

Retribution ! Bah ! Billy bowed his head, half sick with humiliation and shame. What a miserable, puling infant he had become ! Even

Archer—the man who could steal—seemed to him an enviable figure in contrast! Indeed, how cool the money-lender had kept, how sneeringly self-possessed had been his bearing, and how subtle and how well-timed had been his taunting answers! Who would have thought this furtive-eyed Shylock such a master of verbal fence! A knock at the office door interrupted the young man's reflections.

"Come!" he said in a voice that still held a tinge of bitterness, and Larkin turned the knob and entered.

Too wise to refer to so recent an unpleasantness, the farmer greeted Billy carelessly and plunged at once into the business which had taken him there.

"We want you to take this case," he went on, as he seated himself and thrust out an arm upon the table, "and collect all the evidence to be had. We want you to 'push' it vigorously. Left to Bowers, nothing will be done, and finally the whole thing will be smoothed over in spite of us. Putting off doesn't suit us: we want it tried in October. Please give us your answer."

Billy smiled at the energetic tone of the man. "Login has told me something of this," he replied, "and I am perfectly willing to accept your retainer. The fact is, I have a personal interest in the indictment and I am as anxious as any one of you can possibly be to see those rascals punished. Certainly I'll take the case, and I'll do the very best that I can." He sat for a moment silent and thoughtful. He knew the people of Keowee—knew how soon this flurry of wrath would be spent and how many influences Shaw and his sympathising friends would bring to bear upon them. Thinking of these things, he turned to Larkin suddenly.

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"Mr. Larkin," he said, "I have already told you that in some sense this case is my own. Furthermore, I have a reputation to make. My clients must know their own minds, for if they grow weary I shall not, and I shall press the charge regardless of their wishes."

Larkin held out his hand. "Billy," he said, "that is why I urged them to employ you."

Afterward, when Larkin was gone and he was again left alone, Billy, weary of the company of his law-books, strolled across the square to the long, cool piazza of the house wherein he lodged. For when he came first to reside in Bellville the old hotel had appealed to him, for the appetising odours of fat Maum Tempe's cookery were as those which arose in their fragrance up to the smoke-blackened rafters of that well-remembered kitchen at the Mayson place. Besides, his grandfather had in his youth been used to foregather here and so had recommended the place. So Billy had brought his belongings to this ancient hostelry, and Maum Tempe, recognising in his bearing some marks of "de quality," had forthwith adopted him.

Now the old wooden house was the only home which remained to Billy, and he came to it through the afternoon sunshine because he was tired and because he wished to be alone. Moreover, it was hot over there in the crowded court-room, where of right he ought to have been—hot and odorous, for there were many Negroes—and a stale smell of tobacco was the incense offered to justice.

But here upon the deserted piazza a breeze blowing fresh from the hills rustled gently among the green leaves of the clambering vines and the blended perfume of many blossoms smote delicately

upon his nostrils. Lighting his pipe, he leaned back in his chair and gave himself over to rest.

Still his humiliation was much too recent to permit a conscious enjoyment of his surroundings, and he was forced unwillingly to remember the adverse ending of his suit, his rage—he, a lawyer, who ought to have known so much better—and his adversary's sneering triumph. Later he found himself wondering if Larkin had witnessed his outbreak, and whether, supposing that Larkin and his associates had known of his ill-behaviour beforehand, they would still have decided to employ him. How did they happen to select him, anyway—young and inexperienced as he was? Johnson was an excellent lawyer, Shaw one of the shrewdest of "wire-pullers," and with these two to conduct the defense the prosecution would be forced to fight hard.

Presently he hit upon a solution. It was not very flattering to his self-esteem, but it was satisfactory. Politics had barred all abler men, and Larkin—for old John Mayson's sake—had steered the case into his hands. He smiled a compliment to his own perspicacity. Yes, that was the explanation—he had Larkin and Login to thank.

Well, he was glad of the work, let the opportunity come as it would. He wanted no votes—certainly he wanted none from the crowd that Jason Simpkins led—and he had not forgotten Mammy Nancy and old Aunt Clairsey yet. Yes, indeed, he would "push" the prosecution—would "push" it until even his employers would wince.

He leaned back and knocked the ashes from his pipe. A purple-throated humming-bird hovering over a blossom caught his attention and he watched

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absently the metallic luster reflected from its feathers. Out in the west the sun was almost "down," and long shadows were creeping across the streets. Presently the "court-crier" came out on a balcony above the flight of court-house steps.

"Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! All pers'ns hav'n' bus'n' b'fo' t' Co't Com'n Pleas, notice—co't now adjourn' t' nine-er-clock t'-morr' mornin'."

As the strident jargon died away, a motley crowd—some white and some black, some in dark coats and immaculate linen, some in jeans and coarse cotton, some in the ragged, toil-stained garments of the desperately poor—poured out through the court-house doors and down the stone steps and streamed off in straggling lines across the dusty square. The Judge, the Solicitor and the visiting lawyers directed their steps toward that pretentious caravansary which stands so garishly on the northern corner; but possessing tastes which demanded good food rather than an elaborate service, many of the farmers rounded the black bulk of the stand-pipe and came straight toward the old house which with its quiet piazza lay just opposite them.

Seeing this movement and being in no mood for the disconnected babble of the many—the small-talk of crops and of droughts and of those "opinions which prevail, sir, in our neighbourhood"—Billy abandoned his easy chair and strolled away. The afternoon was almost perfect, and as he walked his mood grew reminiscent. Night was coming on, he reflected, and at the Mayson place the mellow light lay upon the rounded hills and the whippoorwills were circling above the hillside pines, and out by the "cuppen" fence Aunt Clairsey was calling the cattle home. A great wave of longing swept over

him—a desire to go and behold all this. Truly, it seemed to him that the Keowee country was a goodly land and that his own lost Mayson place was set in the midst thereof.

But he had lost his suit, his birthright was gone, and in all the broad land of Carolina no foot of earth remained to the Mayson blood, yet there behind that gray stone wall upon which the wild fox-grapes hung Mayson lay beside Mayson each in silent tenure of that soil which once he had loved.

Thus “chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancy” the young man passed through the busy streets and came to the edge of the town, and there at the hill above the creek he stopped and, resting his arms upon the decrepit fence which skirted the road, looked out across the valley. Below him, waiting to be driven home, the full-fed quiet cattle stood knee deep in the summer grass and the laughing stream was turned into silver by the touch of the slanting light.

“Co’! Co’! Co’, wenchy!” Clear and full and carrying far like the notes of a hunter’s horn a woman’s voice came floating and echoing and quivering from beyond the green stretches of the woodland, and as the voice died away a buggy with a gray horse attached came into view on the face of the opposite slope.

The driver—a lady, evidently, for Billy’s eye had caught the flutter of a skirt—came slowly down to the bridge which she did not use, for as she reached it she turned aside into the broad and shallow ford which lay just below and which bore much evidence of usage. The horse stopped just in the centre of the pool, drank leisurely, made a reluctant move and stopped again, this time quite

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suddenly. The lady took her whip from its socket and, stooping, fished in the water with the handle; afterward she tried to step out on the shaft; finally she sat up straight and looked about helplessly.

Billy, noticing her embarrassment, took his arms from the fence and descended the hill to the rescue. As he drew near there was a constrained laugh on the lady's part and then an exclamation of surprise.

"Why, Billy! Billy Mayson! I—I—I didn't know who you were!"

Billy's reserve, which he had firmly resolved to maintain, melted as he heard a little quiver of pleasure in her tones, and he looked at her quizzically and laughed.

"Need help?" he inquired.

Annie made a comical gesture. "Billy, a trace has broken—here of all places in the world—and I can't reach it nor can I get out, unless——" She looked down at her well-shod feet and shook her head.

What a relief it was to find her in this mood, he thought. She was the same open-hearted good comrade that she had always been. What riddles women are anyway!

"Unless what?" he asked lightly.

She leaned over the dashboard toward him. "Billy," she remarked confidentially, "I don't want to spoil my shoes—they're new—but if you'll just go away I can take them off and wade out!"

For a moment he stood irresolute. How he longed to wade in and to take her out in his arms. Then he flushed suddenly, for he was growing angry with her and with himself. Did she think him a child that she played with him in this fashion?

"You keep still"—there was a touch of mastery in his voice and her face coloured rosily—"I can

wade, too, as perhaps you remember, but I'm not going to." Then he brought a few rails from the fence and with these and some stones he fashioned a passable causeway.

"Do you remember the last time we did that?" Her head was bent close to his as he leaned over the wheel cutting a new "eye" in the trace.

"Did what, Annie?" She was so close to him that he could not permit himself to look up.

"Why, built a bridge, of course."

"Oh, that! Yes, indeed! It was down on the creek at home. We were both barefooted, I remember. We didn't mind wading then."

She leaned back, laughing musically. "Do you think of those days often, Billy?"

"Not if I can help it," he answered.

She sobered in an instant, but she misunderstood him, whether purposely or not let those who know women answer.

"Billy," she inquired sympathetically, "is it true that the Mayson place is gone?"

"Ah, yes! Gone!" In spite of himself there was a catch in his voice as he released the shaft and made his way back to the shore.

"You're all right now," he continued. "Drive out!"

As the buggy reached the bank she checked the horse. The opportunity had at last come, she thought, in which to show Billy that she was still his friend. Of course she must be careful: there must be no possibility of a misunderstanding.

"Will you come with me, Billy?" she invited, making room for him on the seat. "Mrs. Mack and Maum Tempe will have to take care of me to-night, so I am travelling your way, you see."

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Without reply he took the offered place and, as she drove on, sat looking straight ahead at the steeples and roofs of the town, now all gilded and transfigured by the marvellous dying light. He understood her intention, but it was not in him to longer play at forgetting, and it was with a pang of bitter regret that he remembered Laura Gray. As far as he had been able he had monopolised Laura; really he had determined that some day, some far-off day when he had won fame and fortune, he would ask her to be his wife. And now Annie had come—Annie whom he had wished to forget—and he had looked into her eyes and he knew at last that for him there was but one woman in all the wide world, the woman whom in his folly he had so utterly lost.

"Annie," his voice was tremulous and she looked at him in surprise, yet his inquiry was commonplace enough, "your mother is well, is she not?"

"Oh, yes!" A sense of constraint came upon her and she strove to cast it off. "Yes; she says that you have entirely forgotten her. You used to come so often, you know."

"Too often!" he said bitterly, and she grew silent.

The supper bell of the old inn was clanging insistently as they drew up at the gate, and Mrs. Mack, espying them, came hurrying out to welcome her newly arrived guest.

"How well you are looking, to be sure," she said to Annie; "and how's your mother? It has certainly been an age since you were up here last."

Still chattering, she led the girl into the house while Billy stalked moodily behind and went up the stairs to his room.

"Poor fellow," continued the landlady as he

passed out of earshot. "He has just lost all of his property and he don't look like himself to-night. Had you heard about it, my dear? He's such a nice young man, too!"

But Billy in the quiet of his room was taking himself sharply to task, and when Annie met him in the morning he was quite his former self again. Then, after she had gone and the court had finally adjourned, he set himself steadily to work upon the case against "Simpkins and others."



CHAPTER XIX

HOW THE PEOPLE CHANGED THEIR MINDS

It was two full weeks before Billy Mayson saw Laura again. His frame of mind regarding her after his last meeting with Annie Chambliss had not been an enviable one. He was not bound to Laura nor she to him, yet there was between the two that hazy, ill-defined half-understanding which so often exists between a man and a woman and from which trouble so often springs. Now he was questioning himself. Did Laura love him? If so, what, in honour, should be his course—how best could he lessen this great wrong which in his ignorance he had done?

Sometimes he thought that he would end the whole matter at once by asking her to marry him. Then if she refused he would be at peace with himself, and if she did not he would try hard to make her happy—would not expect too much and would devote his whole life to her. And if he went away from Bellville, if he did not see Annie again, if he resolutely put away from himself all memory of that rambling old Chambliss house, of the bees and the bird-songs and the clover, and of the girl who had been used to call to him laughingly across the bush-hidden, broken fences, it might be that after awhile he himself would be satisfied.

But since he could not go to her with too palpable a lie upon his lips, for the time being he remained

away, confining himself closely to his office and devoting himself to the work which he had taken in hand. And it never occurred to him that he was troubling himself when really he had no need—that Fate, with the assistance of Laura, had already solved his difficulty.

For in those days when Billy Mayson was yet wrestling with his commentaries in the old library of his grandfather's house, Laura Gray had, after the manner of her kind, been engaged in a somewhat desultory love-passage with a rather weak-kneed and entirely sentimental young man named Johnson. It had not seemed to her to be quite such a serious affair as the young man had imagined it, hence when Johnson had fallen sick and had been ordered away in search of climatic change she had given him a golden curl by which to remember her and had straightway forgotten him altogether.

But the young man was ill, his interests in life had grown fewer, and there were not many things that he cared to remember. Hence he had spent much of that leisure which was so inexorably forced upon him in thinking of Laura Gray and in idealising her.

He liked to think of himself, too, and he spent a great many hours in regarding himself as a hero who was too brave to ask the woman he loved to sacrifice her life to an invalid. He pictured Laura waiting for him, oh, so anxiously, and wearing the roses from her cheeks in heart-break and loneliness. And at such times he would take out the curl which she had given him and his eyes would grow misty as he looked upon it, and then he would raise it reverently to his lips.

At home, in the big white house on the quiet street

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in strenuous, busy Bellville, Laura was quite joyously following her own inclinations with never a thought of him, but he knew better than that; yes, much better. Laura—Laura of the deep-blue eyes and the witching smile—was kneeling each night by her low, white bed and praying to the good God and the angels to guard that lover of hers and to bring him safely back to her. For facts have little to do with happiness; it is only belief which counts.

But in spite of the doctors and of the climate to which they had sent him Johnson got well at last, and being grateful and also being a man who had "great possessions," he gave thanks and offerings and made haste to the girl whom he had left behind. Therefore he had arrived in Bellville during the sitting of the court and was able to listen to an effective plea by an uncle of his own in behalf of Jason Simpkins.

And as he had made no doubt it would be, his home-coming was well-pleasing to Laura. For when Billy Mayson was in Laura's presence—when he held her plump white hands within his larger ones and bent his strong face near to hers, when the moon hid in the blue heavens behind wisps of fleecy cloud and when the soft and sensuous air was full of that subtle fragrance which rides only on the wings of the night, then, indeed, the cautious resolutions made so readily of mornings when her hair was out of curl seemed vain and useless things; and if on one of those evenings he had taken her in his arms—if he had drawn her close to himself and had spoken to her tenderly yet with a mastering and masterly passion, she might have been swept far past those narrow bounds which her calculating prudence had set, and with a

happiness known only to the love-mad, the drunken and the gods, might have yielded herself to him entirely. But since he had done none of these things, since he had grown disappointing and moody and had scarcely pressed his advantage at all, she had been altogether guided by her reason, and now that both his humour and his prospects were gloomy it seemed to her best that their intimacy should draw to a close.

To Laura, therefore, at this very moment that Billy had grown "impossible," the home-coming of Gary Johnson seemed an occurrence most fortunate. She really liked Gary after her own very careless fashion, for he was a kindly, good-natured and rather sentimental soul to whom Dame Fortune had given an estate in lieu of health. So the man was made welcome, and, since Billy was holding himself aloof, he slipped quite naturally into Billy's vacant place.

Weary at last of his isolation and feeling that Laura would be puzzled by the sudden cessation of his visits, Billy at the end of his fortnight of unrest set out one evening for the residence of the Grays. He had thought to have met Laura on the streets before this time or at least to have had from her one of those clusters of summer roses which she had been in the habit of sending him, but fortune had not favoured him with either, and in some way the lack of that passing word and of the little token of remembrance served to heighten the sense of estrangement from Laura which had so suddenly come upon him. It was therefore with a certain feeling of awkwardness and of reluctance that he approached the gate through which he had so often passed.

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Drawing near to the house, he made out the figures on the porch—Julian Gray, rotund and good-humoured as a well-to-do merchant should be; Laura's mother, fair, something more than forty, and not yet fat; and Laura herself—the whole group but half revealed by the obscured light of a lamp which stood in the hallway beyond. Besides these, the usual inmates of the house, there was, seated too much in the shadow to be readily recognised, one other person—a man.

"Ah, good evening, Mr. Mayson." The merchant, combining effort with dignity as only a fleshy man can combine the two, rose and met Billy at the steps. "You know Mr. Johnson, do you not? Mr. Johnson, this is Mr. Mayson, one of our—er—rising young lawyers."

Longing for his quiet cigar and feeling that he had done all that could possibly be required of him, the merchant ambled away as the ladies made their greeting, leaving to his wife the task of entertaining Billy. That lady, a much more acute observer than her husband, saw or thought that she saw the inwardness of the situation, and she thought it her duty to simplify matters. Just how far her daughter had encouraged young Mayson to go she did not know, but she did believe that the quicker enlightenment came to Billy the better it would be for all parties concerned.

"Yes, Gary and Laura have always been friends," she was murmuring so low that the others could not hear, "and such a beautiful character he is, Mr. Mayson. You will find him so, I am sure, when you come to know him better. He was quite broken-hearted when he had to go out West and leave all his friends, and that beautiful house,

and—Laura. He was such a real favourite with Laura."

"We live when we love." The girl was speaking in a low voice, but it was so penetrating that he could not choose but hear.

"We live when we love! Because I have loved I have lived!" The darkness hid the man's unconscious movement toward Laura but his tones told a great deal.

"And we were afraid he would never be well. Now he is back and we are all so glad!" Mrs. Gray rambled monotonously on.

Billy sat up straight in his chair, an odd sensation, half mirth, half anger, stirring in his breast. An hour before he would have been glad to know that Laura's happiness was assured, but now the thought that another man was winning took him for just one moment by the throat and choked him.

"And where has Mr. Mayson been for so long?" Laura had changed places with her mother and Mrs. Gray was vanishing into the hall. "Have you been busy?"

"Oh, yes, very! Court, you know, and cases and all such stuff as that!" He had told her once of all those cases but he did not care to remind her of it now. "I shall try to keep busy hereafter——" In spite of himself a note of depression had crept into his voice. Laura moved uneasily and for a moment there was silence. Often a silence between two is eloquent, but in the presence of three it is awkward.

"You are rather a newcomer in Bellville, Mr. Mayson," remarked Johnson politely in an effort to make conversation.

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"Well, in a way," replied Billy. "I am country bred, you know. And you?"

"Oh, I was born here. All my interests are here. You know my uncle, I presume?"

"Mr. Samuel Johnson," interpolated Laura by way of explanation.

"Yes, certainly." He rose and took his hat. Since his grandfather's death his calls at the Grays had been entirely informal. Now he felt that he was spoiling the evening for this young man in the shadow. As for himself, he saw half regretfully, half in relief, that Laura had no need of him. He had "shown his face" as it was his duty to do, and that accomplished there could be no necessity for further platitudes.

"Good-night, Miss Laura," he said, extending his hand, "and good-by."

She rose and put her hand in his. Her heart beat rapidly; she scarcely dared to trust her utterance. Behind her, in the shadow and looking at her with trustful eyes, was a man whose faith in her was as the faith of a little child. Only a few hours had passed since she had said to that one that she loved him, that through all the years she had thought only of him, and that now in the hour of his coming to her her life had grown very full. Yet as Billy Mayson stood with her hand in his own, ready to depart from her life, she believed, as presently he would depart from her father's house, every tripping beat of her heart sent to her ears a murmur of despair.

"Good-by, Billy." There was a tremor in her voice—a thrill such as the man whom she had chosen would never be able to set vibrating there, and as Billy stepped with bared head out upon the

steps and passed down the gravelled walk, had he once said "Come!" she would have followed him.

But he went straight on, never heeding nor looking backward. Then the latch of the gate clicked softly and he was gone.

"One kiss, my darling! Just one as you bid me good-night!" begged poor, happy Johnson a short hour afterward, but she shrank from his touch and shivered.

"Not to-night!" she pleaded piteously. "Any time—any other time, but—oh, I beg you, not to-night!"

Johnson was no brute, so he left her and went away wondering. When he had been yonder in the gray Colorado mountains, when the future had seemed dark and there had been no hope, then his faith had been deep and untroubled; but now in the day of his joy a doubt had come and a vague uneasiness—a doubt for which the kisses of the morrow could never compensate. Yet throughout the whole of his after life—a short and trying life it proved to be—Laura dealt with him tenderly and was ever just and considerate—far more considerate, no doubt, than she would have been had she married Billy Mayson. For the most happy are seldom the most thoughtful.

But to Billy Mayson, lying awake in his bed on the bright summer morning that followed his call, it seemed as if a load had been lifted from his spirits. For although he believed that Annie cared nothing for him, yet now he was free to love her frankly, honestly and openly. And if he did this—if he simply made a joke of this serious matter and did not grow sentimental nor in any way annoy her—he felt sure that his good comrade Annie would



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laugh with him at his predicament and would not mind his keeping very near to her nor performing for her those little services which while not helping her a great deal would mean so much to him.

Besides being well this morning, the cool breeze, fresh with the touch of the dew, was sweeping into his chamber, and the light dust-particles were dancing in the broad sunbeams which, slipping past the curtains of his window, fell over the bed and barred the uncarpeted floor. Presently a bell rang loudly, and Jake, the house servant, resplendent in a clean white apron, thrust his woolly head in at the door.

"Fus' bell, Mr. Mayson," he called. "Time ter git up, sah!"

Yawning violently, Billy turned over, half rose, then stretched himself back in the brilliant sunlight. Then the bell rang again and Jake's head reappeared.

"*Second* ringin' of de *fus'* bell," he announced. "Better git up, Mr. Mayson. Brekfus' might' nigh ready, sah!"

Billy threw a shoe against the door with a great show of violence and the Negro dodged skilfully, rang his bell again and again reappeared, a broad grin stretching from ear to ear.

"*Fus'* ringin' of de *secon'* bell," he said, with a bow. "Yo' gits up at de *secon'* bell, don' you, sah? Yassir, dey is fryin' de battercakes right now. Better come 'long down ef yer wants ter git 'em hot off'n de stove."

Jerking a sheet about his shoulders, the young man disappeared with a bound into the adjoining room.

"Des' lissen!" ejaculated the Negro. "Dat man

a-sloshin' water all over dat baffroom flo'. 'Tain't no use er dat nohow!"

Clothed and in his right mind, Billy came down in due season to the breakfast table. Most of the other boarders had eaten and gone before he arrived, but Maum Tempe had his battercakes hot, his sliced ham done to a turn, and his soft-boiled eggs were just two minutes in the kettle. Ah, how pleasant it was in the cool, darkened dining-room; how fragrant the steaming coffee, how clean and fresh and inviting the cut glass, the old-fashioned silver and the snowy table-linen.

Billy entered and seated himself and in a little while Maum Tempe came.

"Ev'eyt'ing ter yer likin', sir? Yassir, dat's de way yer grampaw used ter lak 'em. Oh, I kin cook fer folks whut *is* folks! Dis yere pore trash whut's a-comin' up now dey dunno whut eatin' is! Er man come in yere tudder day an' wanted sugar on 'is rice! Huh! Yassir! Sugar an' milk! Des' wanted ter make a sweet mush an' den eat hit! Naw, sir, I dunno whar he come f'um. Do' wanter know, nuther—do' want no doin's wid no sich ign'unce as dat. Sugar on rice! My law!"

His breakfast finished, the young man went across the square to his office. Bowers, the solicitor, had left the investigation of the Simpkins case entirely to him, and he had much to do. Scarcely a day passed, indeed, in which he did not place a fresh warrant in the Sheriff's hands. Griggs and Shaw, who had conducted themselves hitherto as if entirely oblivious of his existence, had begun to speak to him when they met him in the street.

Bowers, indeed, had found it exceedingly convenient to be thus easily rid of a troublesome matter.

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Before, let him act as he would, he was sure to offend some of the voters of Keowee. If he prosecuted the night-riders, then they and their friends would "scratch" his name from their tickets, while if he failed to do this the landowners would have cause for complaint. But now, since the farmers had employed a special attorney, it was evident that they expected nothing of the solicitor; so Bowers rubbed his hands and smiled pleasingly and very promptly referred all the complainants to "my young colleague just over the way." In fact, Bowers saw no reason why he should not "carry" Keowee "solid."

Billy Mayson, however, was resolved that in the Keowee country at least an end should be made to those lawless outbreaks which were demoralising the labour and ruining the good name of the State. He had sprung from the old land-holding stock and the instincts of law and of justice were strong within him. The newer order of things which was coming to prevail about him he could by no means understand, for it was foreign both to his breeding and to his blood to perpetrate gross wrong or to countenance such for the sake of any gain political or pecuniary. Not that many of the people of his section could be approached with a direct bribe, but there were other influences, many and complex, which might be brought to bear. Personal prejudices could be aroused, ties of kinship existed, and the obligations which hold among friends as well as business connections and political alliances. Billy Mayson was astounded when he found that so great a number of reputable men were thus closely connected with those who had wrought the outrages, and he was still more astonished when he found that, however vocifer-

ously these might clamour on the court-house square for decency and for public order, yet they were silently at work endeavouring to hush the matter and to save the offenders from punishment.

This morning the young man had just reached his office when the Sheriff likewise came thither.

"Morning, Billy!" he called out as he limped his way to a chair. "Fine day, ain't it? My! my! I do get tired of town such weather as this. I was down about Keowee yesterday to see about those warrants which you gave me to serve. I got some of the men we want."

"You haven't caught Sullivan, have you?" asked Billy, without looking up from the paper on which he was engaged. "Larkin told me last week that Sullivan, next to Jason himself, was the leader of the crowd. If so, I would be glad to get hold of him."

"No," replied Login musingly; "I have been looking for that fellow ever since the first warrants were issued, but invariably he has dodged me. He seems to be a pretty sly one. There are two or three others, however, who are giving me just as much trouble. They haven't left the neighbourhood—if they were gone entirely I'd be better satisfied—but they are simply in hiding, and a good many of those people down there are helping to screen them."

Billy laid down his pen and turned around in his chair. "Sympathise with them, do they?" he inquired with some interest.

"Yes. Some, too, are beginning to grumble at you—not only the Simpkins crowd: their mouthings were to be expected—but some of the better class of folks. There's Perry, now, a leading man in beginning this prosecution; he's getting wabbly.

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I heard him say to Shaw yesterday that he thought you were making a mistake."

"Yes, I know Perry—he can't be depended on; but how about the farmers in general? How about those who have taken no prominent part either in prosecuting or in defending? What do they say?"

"Oh, they claim that everything has got quiet now and that they think you ought to drop the matter and not be stirring the country up in the middle of work time. The Keowee merchants are pulling against you, too. You see, the merchants have advanced these fellows the supplies with which to make a crop and if the crowd is convicted the merchants are pretty sure to lose some money. They want the gang let alone at least until after cotton is gathered. It's reasonable when you look at it that way."

"Perhaps," replied Billy; "but I'm not doing that. I'm looking at it from a different standpoint entirely. If we let these people go unpunished, how long do you suppose it will be before other disturbances will arise? The trouble is that Jason and his crowd want to run things in Bell County exactly to suit themselves, and so long as I stay here they simply can't do it unless they keep within the law."

Login looked at the young man oddly. "That's all very well, Billy," he remarked with a smile, "but if they had let the Mayson place alone maybe you wouldn't have cared so much. Do you think that you would?"

Billy flushed. "I think," he answered, "that they beat Mammy Nancy, that they are a disgrace to the country, and that the sooner they are cleared out the better!"

"Ah, yes! But you can't clear 'em out. Lord, no! That kind sticks. They've been here as far back as I can remember and they'll still be here when you and I are gone. We've just got to take 'em as we find 'em!" The Sheriff looked off across the square to where a member of the much-discussed class was bartering a bunch of musty rabbit skins for a very small piece of "pig-tail" tobacco. "They are a hopeless sort," he added reflectively.

Presently he turned his eyes back to Billy. "Say," he continued. "You won't thank me for tellin' you, I guess, but Archer's movin' out to the old place."

"What! The Mayson place?" The young man raised his eyebrows incredulously.

"Yes; went over yesterday. He has hired old Clairsy to cook for him, I hear. Nancy wouldn't stay—she has moved across the creek upon Mrs. Chambliss's land, so Miss Annie told me. By George, there's a girl for you! I met her in the road just at the foot of the long hill coming this way. She's as pretty, sir, as a June rose and as light-footed as a deer. That big bay of hers is a good horse, too."

"Indeed!"

"She asked about you, Billy—rather anxiously, it seemed to me. Wanted to know how you were getting along on this case."

So it was only the case after all! Billy's spirits fell suddenly and he resumed work upon the paper.

From this time on, however, Billy Mayson experienced trouble. More and more the sentiment against the prosecution gained in volume so that presently the landowners, frightened by their growing unpopularity, began to withdraw their support. Finally even those who had employed him deserted and only Larkin remained of them all. Perry, as

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Tom Login phrased it, had gone over "boots and breeches" to the enemy and was a thorn in Billy Mayson's side.

Yet, in spite of black looks, much advice and many objurgations, the lawyer worked steadily on and Jason and his friends grew desperate.

"He air a-crowdin' of us," Jason would remark to his cronies. "He air a-crowdin' of us when he have no 'cashion ter do so. Some er these days he air a-gwine ter git hurt. That thar thing will suttenly happen if he do not loosen his holt. Why, he air ther whole show! Jake Shaw tole me that no longer'n las' Saddy. Jake 'lows that ev'eybody is tired of persecutin' us 'cept ole man Larkin an' this yere durn Billy Mayson. Air you boys a-gwine ter let sich cusses as them sen' we-alls ter ther pen?"

Shaw spoke differently and to a different class.

"Mayson's young, gentlemen. He doesn't know how much trouble he's likely to bring on, and Larkin is getting old and childish. Whipping those Negroes was bad, of course, but it's all over now. Let's get the matter stopped before it splits the party. The other side—the Republicans, who saddled all this State debt on us—are on the watch. A stir like this plays right into their hands. They are not above paying a man—a young man who don't know how much trouble he is making—a pretty good sum to keep this matter before the courts and the public. Mayson's friends ought to see him, gentlemen, and talk to him."

One evening after the mail had come in Billy got a letter. It was postmarked "Keowee" and the envelope was smudged and dirty.

"Mr. B. maYsun eesquar," it read, "yoU had beter drAp ther caSe you has Got agin Simpkins.

you Kin pusH HiT agiN them othrs eF you Wants too But you wil be WiSe too let Sim KiNs a Lone fur He ar DaNGuS! Ef you DoNt pAy no Tention too this Solum warnin you wil Git Hert sUm nitE shOrE.—(signed) Yore FrEN!"

Billy grew red with wrath as he spelled the missive out, then his nostrils dilated and his head went up sharply.

"The fool!" he ejaculated. "What do you think of that, Sheriff?" For he was in the lobby of the post-office and Login stood next to him.

The Sheriff took the sheet and seesawed it back and forth in the light of the oil-lamp that was fastened to the wall, then failing to decipher it he put on his spectacles.

"Hm! Sounds like Jason himself!" he remarked.

"I'll just have to thrash the scamp yet!" said Billy disgustedly as he reclaimed the paper and tore it into bits.

But afterward, in the privacy of his room, he thought the matter over again, and under the shadow of the threat he repented very earnestly of his sins.

"What have I done?" he asked himself. "What have I done that any man—even Jason—should frighten me so?" Then he laughed uproariously and tumbled headlong into his bed.

"Wha's de matter wid dat man?" asked Jake of Maum Tempe as the echoes floated down to the kitchen. "Pers lak he feel hisse'f. Slosh he baff-water so of a mornin' dat I has ter take hit up wid er mop!"

"Des lak a Mayson!" replied Maum Tempe admiringly. "You kain't hack dat breed. De mo' dey lose de mo' dey laugh. I knows 'em, I does.

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Dat man willin' ter die right now ter git he plantation back, but he ain't a-gwine ter 'low nobody ter know dat. Naw, sir! Yer nuvver kin tell whut dem Maysons is a-studyin' erbout. But yer kain't hack 'em nur yer kain't skeer em. Hit ain't in de breed."

But although he disregarded it and felt it rather than really knew of it, the undercurrent of resentment against the young man reached even to Bellville, and Shaw and Griggs were not sparing in efforts to strengthen it. Then vague rumours began to spring up from no one knew whither that Billy Mayson was certainly in the pay of the Republicans and that he was meeting with the Negroes at night and was teaching them those things which he wished them to say in court. At one time such talk concerning a man of Billy's standing would have been dismissed with a scornful laugh, but since then the horrible mistake of "Reconstruction" had been made and the men of the Keowee country still remembered it with shudders and with loathing.

It was not hard, therefore, to mislead and alarm the people, and presently all sympathy for Billy in his effort to secure punishment for Simpkins and his men was hastily withdrawn. A few, indeed—those who knew him best—believed in him and honoured him for his courage, but the public at large looked at him askance. But through it all, with lips a little whitened and drawn perhaps, yet with a temper even and serene, Billy Mayson went on just as his grandfather would have done, drawing a network of evidence about Jason and his associates so closely that their conviction seemed almost a certainty. He knew his people, knew their foibles and their faults, and he knew that in the

end they are just. Therefore, he felt that a time would come when they would understand his work for them. He could wait for that time, he thought.

So July and August passed and the first days of September came. Then at Shaw's suggestion Perry headed a delegation from the Keowee country to wait on Billy Mayson and to remonstrate with him.

Half the people in Bellville stood in their doors as the crowd, with Shaw and Griggs bringing up the rear, left the court-house steps and made its way to Billy Mayson's office.

"Look out, Mayson!" called Kyle from the end of the veranda. "They're coming. They may mean mischief!"

Billy did not remove his pipe from his mouth nor his feet from their resting-place on the office table.

"Thank you, Kyle," he answered. "They'll find me in when they get here."

As the head of the crowd reached the steps, Tom Login, with a double-barrelled gun in his hand, crawled in at the office window.

"Bought a new gun, Billy," he said, laughing nervously. "Just thought I'd let you look at it. Hallo!" He tried hard to look surprised as Perry and his followers came in at the door.

Billy looked up and took his feet from the table. His glance was cool, but it had a trace of inquiry in it.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," he said, and waited.

The delegation filed slowly in. There were not chairs for all, and some stood leaning against the walls. Login sat in the window, fumbling with the lock of his gun. Perry alone made answer.

"Mr. Mayson," he began sonorously, after the

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manner of a speaker to an audience, "we have come to see you——" He hesitated as he cast about for a fitting phrase.

"Yes," interrupted Billy in a voice of deceptive smoothness. "Why?"

Thinking himself affronted, Perry coloured hotly, while in spite of themselves the delegation were moved to laughter. The laugh added to the farmer's wrath.

"About this consortin' with niggers!" he roared.

Billy rose very slowly. The table was between them and he walked round it deliberately. Just in front of Perry he stopped.

"Did I understand you to address me, Mr. Perry?" he asked in a low voice that was vibrating with emotion.

"Billy! Billy!" cried Login warningly. The Sheriff had caught the menace in the tone and there were ten to one against them here.

But Perry's face had whitened. "They say——! I didn't mean——!" he stammered.

Billy looked at him, laughed shortly, and turned to Griggs. "You understand the meaning of this? What's it all about?" he asked impatiently.

The Senator advanced, smiled pleasantly and bowed. "As I understand it, my dear sir, it is simply that a number of your fellow-citizens—your one-time neighbours of Keowee—realising, sir, that you are—er—somewhat unfamiliar with the political history of the State, wish—er—to consult with you, sir, and to advise you. They appreciate your high motives, sir, your honesty of purpose and your ability—yes, indeed, I may say your undoubted ability—but they think that perhaps you have overlooked the interests of the people—the dear people,

my dear sir, and the farmer who 'feedeth them all'—and they wish to arrange—with no loss to you, my dear sir—for your withdrawal——”

“Yes,” interrupted Billy, weary of the tortuous harangue, “I have no doubt! But if you mean that you have come to persuade me to withdraw from the case against Simpkins, I can give you my answer at once, for I am simply not going to do it.”

“But, Mr. Mayson,” began Perry again, “we hired you—you are simply an employee—you agreed——”

“I agreed to prosecute this case,” answered Billy gravely. “That which I agreed to do I do, God being my helper! Can you say as much, Mr. Perry?”

“I just want to say,” continued Perry, ignoring the embarrassing question, “that if you'll withdraw from this case we men who hired you will pay you your fee. If you refuse, we won't. We think this matter has gone far enough. First thing you know the nigger'll be in politics again. There's getting to be a lot of talk now.”

“You know me, gentlemen,” said Billy quietly. “I think we may ignore the talk. And I wouldn't mention that fee again if I were you, Perry!”

The crowd filed out. Very few of those things which they had come to say had really been said and some of them were ashamed. Shaw, red-faced and angry, tried to hold them for a mass-meeting in the court-house, but he failed and they went away quietly.

“That boy's all right,” remarked one old fellow with a scar on his face. “Half of this talk is fudge. For one, I'll not trouble him again. He's a blamed sight cleaner man than some of these fellows that's a-doggin' of him.”



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But down in the Keowee country Jason Simpkins was talking to the crowd.

"Sump'n have got ter be done wi' that Billy Mayson," he was saying. "He air hard on us bekase we is pore! He air gwine ter penertencher us ef we don't git red o' him."

CHAPTER XX

THE DISAPPOINTING OF MRS. BINNS

AFTER quiet had been reëstablished in the Keowee neighbourhood and all danger of further molestation had passed, Witch Nancy and old Aunt Clairisy had gone back gladly to their cabins on the Mayson place, and there Archer, when he came to take possession of the land, had found them. To disturb these or any other of the tenants whom he found on the place was not part of the money-lender's plan, for he wished to enter into his new home with as little remark as possible. So he had sent Aunt Clairisy back to her accustomed duties in the hewn-log kitchen and had by many fair speeches and certain small gifts effectually set at rest the apprehensive minds of the farm-hands. But with this newcomer and his affairs Mammy Nancy would have nothing to do. To her mind he was an interloper and an adventurer, and one, withal, whom the gods would presently smite because of irreverence and because of his great presumption.

"I gwine!" she had said at the end of an afternoon of summer thunder and of showers, as she stood in her cabin door and spoke to the awed and wondering Negroes. "Oh, yes, I gwine; but one er dese days I is comin' back yere agin." Then her voice had fallen to a mysterious tone and she had stretched

out her skinny hand, pointing in one comprehensive sweep to the red, rain-washed hills, to the gloomy reaches of the pines gray-wreathed in rising mist, to the house above which the heavy clouds were breaking, and to the wide, low-lying valley. "Whose is all dis yere? Kin you tell me? Who walks dese pafs an' ride dese roads 'way yander een de darkes' night? Howcome yer yahd-dog howl, ole Amos? What dat he see een de road? You look an' yer doan see nuthin', an de dog he howl an' he mo'n an' de dahk shadders shake all trimly lak! Ole marster out dar, Amos! John Mayson done riz up an' he axin yer 'bout 'is lan'! Las' night he ride an' he ride; ter-morrer night he keep ridin' on. Some night he stop—he hitch 'is hoss dar at de gate—he go ter de liberry room! Oh, Archer man, whut yer gwine ter do when ole marster come back fer he own?"

This had been her farewell, for on the next day she had removed her belongings—her "chist" and her chickens and her cat and her dog—to a cabin on the Chambliss farm.

It was a lonely spot which she had chosen, the house having first been built merely as a temporary storing-place for cotton and not as a dwelling-place at all. On one side was the long, low line of the creek, here threading its way through a marsh filled with dead trees and with rushes and with the stiff brown pompons of the millet-like "cat-tails." On the other was an abandoned clearing, the blackened stumps peering dismally above a waste of yellowish green weeds, and the fences were broken and brier-ridden. There were other cabins vacant on the Chambliss place—comfortable cabins up at the "quarter," only a short half-mile away—and


Mrs. Chambliss would willingly have granted her one, but she would have none of these.

"Jes' gimme dat little ole house by de swamp, Mis' Ma'y," she had said. "Jes' put a 'stick-an'-clay' chimley ter hit an' lemme sta yeen dar, please, ma'am. Sonny is er-comin' home agin one er dese days—comin' back ter 'is house an' ter de ole plantation. Gimme dat little ole house, Mis' Ma'y, whar I kin stan' een de do' an' watch fer him 'ginst he come."

Then Annie, moved with a sudden sympathy, had come to the witch-woman's aid, and so the matter had been settled.

And now that all the troubles were past and the crops were "laid by" and the cotton fields were beginning to whiten with snowy promises of autumn pickings, a sense of repose spread itself over all the countryside and the long shadows grew longer and the warm, hazy air was full of wistfulness. Amid this peace Witch Nancy busied herself gathering "yerbs" and drying them, and Annie, touched by the beauty of the waning summer, found time to rest and to reflect.

Very swiftly and very gently the last few years had passed over the girl and those things which were hers. The staunch old house was perhaps a little more weather-stained, the "new-growth" pines in the "old fields" were taller, and the "galled" spots on the denuded hillsides had grown a little longer and broader—a little more unkempt and desolate-looking. During much of the time Annie and her mother had been alone except for the presence of the Negroes, but their busy lives had saved them from loneliness. Once or twice they had gone away during the summer to some quiet



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resort, once or twice they had made brief visits to distant towns. Sometimes, too, visitors had come to the farm—a relative or an old friend of her mother or merely a chance acquaintance; sometimes the younger folk from Keowee had gathered at the house, designedly or by accident, in the summer afternoons or upon winter evenings. Some of her experiences had been laughable—as when the bald-headed druggist had asked her to marry him and had grown indignant at her prompt refusal. One had taken a slightly tragic cast. She felt rather sorry for that young minister, for he seemed greatly dejected afterward; still she could not feel quite certain: melancholy may arise from dyspepsia rather than from unrequited love. Ben Jim had grown much this last year in stature and in courtliness, and he had taken the melancholy minister under his especial care.

“Whar'bouts do hit hurt yer, Boss?” he had been heard to inquire sympathetically.

It was a source of much satisfaction to her that Billy Mayson came sometimes nowadays to see her mother, and that she could meet him again without awkwardness and even ride with him along the pleasant roads with some approach to their old-time companionship. That people were saying hard things of Billy she knew, but she thought that she understood. Had not old Clairisy come to her, and had she herself not gone in person into Keowee to see that justice was done? What had she cared then for the nagging criticisms of the small-minded? What would Billy care now? Still, Simpkins had made threats against Billy, if all reports were true—Simpkins and the “poor white” crowd; but such people as those wouldn't dare

touch a gentleman! Why—why—— Just there she had stopped, half ashamed of her hot and sudden indignation.

But although the chastened sunlight of September had brought peace and restfulness to the Chambliss farm, it had been less kind to Mrs. Binns. Throughout the spring and summer she had done her poor best and Parmeely had helped her; but they were women, hence the fields were not well tilled, for the "miz'ry" in Long Jerry's back seemed to grow decidedly worse as the need for exertion grew greater. Heretofore the heaviest of the work had fallen to Luke, but now Luke did not dare show himself in the fields lest Login or the "deppities" find him there and take him away to the jail. So the winter was approaching, and the crop on the Jester place was a failure and food was already scarce.

Throughout the whole of one night Mrs. Binns, who usually took life philosophically, worried over the situation and tossed on her bed and groaned, but when morning came her decision had been made.

"Put on yer clean frock, Parmeely," she said, after a hasty breakfast had been eaten and just as the first level rays of the rising sun crept in at the open doorway. "Put on yer clean frock an' git yer bonnit an' come go 'long wi' me."

"Whar mout yer be gwine?" inquired Long Jerry, as he sought amid the ashes for a coal that was yet alight.

"I is gwine ter Bellville. They tells me 'at Billy Mayson is a-persecutin' Luke. I wants Billy ter stop hit. I needs Luke—needs him ter he'p make a livin'—an' I'm gwine ter tell Billy so. You-all kin say whut yer please, but that boy 'ull lissen ter me.

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I knows him—I knowed his mammy befo' him an' I knowed his pappy, too. Yas, Billy Mayson 'ull lissen ter me when I tells him how pore we is an' how bad we needs Luke here."

Long Jerry balanced the coal gingerly in his palm and laid it on the bowl of his corncob pipe. "Hit ain't no use," he remarked; "Luke 'ud tell yer that ef he war here. 'Tain't no sort o' use! But go on. Yer nuvver would lissen ter me nohow."

She faced him scornfully. "Lissen ter yer!" she exclaimed. "Lissen ter yer! Yeh! Whut mout be ther use?"

Long Jerry's eyes sought the floor. "Ef Luke had er lissened ter me," he muttered doggedly, "he wudden't a-had no trouble—he would ha' let them niggers erlone."

But his wife paid him no further heed and as soon as Parmeely was ready they started. The way to Bellville was long, and if she meant to return before nightfall she must be hurrying. So with Parmeely at her side she journeyed on through the dry red dust of the roads and came wearily enough at noon to Billy Mayson's office door.

It had been a long time since Billy had seen this friend of his younger days, but despite the ravages of privation and of trouble and of age he recognised her at once.

"Come right in, Mrs. Binns!" he called out heartily. "Surely the sight of you is good! And this is Parmeely? The last time that I saw you, Parmeely, you were quite a little tot. Here, you!" He hailed an itinerant vender of apples who was trundling a push-cart across the street, and when the man had stopped he filled the child's lap with the round and rosy fruit. "That," he said, "in

return for some of you mamma's doughnuts. How good they used to taste! Do you know, Mrs. Binns, that I'm coming down some time just to eat of your cooking again. How did you leave Luke, and how is your father, Parmeely?"

The girl, holding her apples in her apron, hung back shyly. Mrs. Binns sighed and sank down into a chair.

"Hit's business whut's brung me here, Billy," she said wearily.

Billy looked at her. "You are tired, Mrs. Binns," he remarked.

"We has 'cashion ter be tired," she answered. "We has walked f'um nigh Keowee ter-day!"

"Walked from Keowee?" he echoed in astonishment.

"Yes. Whut wi' ther chills, an' whut wi' ther drouth, an' whut wi' ther po' lan', we ain't makin' no crap skacely this yeer. Then our wagin hit air broke down now an' our mule hain't so overly strong. Jerry didn't much want us ter come, but me an' Parmeely—wall, we walked ruther'n ter stay."

Even as she spoke a bell across the square clanged insistently and Billy smiled, for he realised that it was the "second ringin' of de fus' bell" and that presently Jake would be grumbling. The woman, too, was tired and no doubt Parmeely was hungry. The two were in no sense persons of his class and their lives lay far apart from his own, but what of that? They were his friends.

"Now, Mrs. Binns," he said with that gentle deference which every woman receives from men of Billy Mayson's kind, "since you have come so far to see me you must let me take care of you. Do

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you and Parmeely come with me and after you have rested and have eaten we can attend to that business of yours."

A softer light sprang into the woman's eyes. It had been so long since any one had been thoughtful of her—since any one had cared whether she were tired or whether she were hungry. It was the merest politeness—she understood that—but she was very grateful to him nevertheless.

Still she had come with a purpose. Until that was accomplished she felt that she could neither eat nor drink—least of all with this man on whom so much depended.

"I thanks yer, Billy," she replied with a little thrill of feeling in her dragging tones, "I does so thank yer! But, Billy, I is in trouble an' Luke he air in trouble an' I darsn't eat tell I knows erbout him! Jerry he said it warn't no use ter come, an' Luke he doan know yit that I is come; but I knowed you would he'p me, Billy, an' I jes' come anyhow, an'—an'—now sence I is got here I—I—somehow, Billy, I ain't so shore."

As she ended her voice had grown tremulous and the sudden tears had started in her eyes. The child, ignorant and uncomprehending yet troubled at her mother's grief, plucked at the woman's sleeve with her little claw-like, toil-hardened fingers. Billy looked on in wonder.

"Why, Mrs. Binns," he said solicitously, "I'll do anything for you that I can—you know that, don't you?"

"It were all erlong o' Br'e'r Jason," she continued, beginning to cry softly. "He got Luke inter them nigger-whippin's yander las' spring, an' now thar's a war'nt out fer my boy an' he air a-dodgin' out

an' a-layin' eround in ther woods. They tole me you wuz ther persecuter, Billy, an'—an' I come ter you." She stopped speaking and watched his face anxiously.

Billy looked troubled, drew a paper from his desk, scanned it and put it down with a sigh of relief.

"There's no warrant for Luke Binns," he announced. "There will be none, I hope."

"His name ain't Binns," she interrupted quickly; "hit's Sullivan—he air my fust husban's chile."

Billy started with surprise and a troubled look came into his face. This Sullivan, then—this man whom he and Login had been trying so hard to catch—was none other than his old friend and playmate, Luke. Luke Sullivan! Until this moment he had not known. Long Jerry Binns had been his grandfather's tenant; Luke was Long Jerry's boy—Luke Binns, of course.

And before him there was a woman who, in spite of the evil name that the men of her class were giving him, had trusted in him and had sought him out in the day of her trouble. Then his mind reverted suddenly to another day—to a time when the grief was all his and not the woman's own at all. The locust trees had been in bloom that day—had filled the air with a wealth of cloying sweetness—and the damp earth had fallen with a hollow sound on a rosewood coffin-lid. He had borne it all while other people were there—had clenched his poor little fists and had bitten his quivering lip and had stared at the world stonily from his place beside his dead. But afterward, when the darkness had come and there was no earthly eye to see, he had crept back there and had climbed the gray stone wall and had laid his small face prone on the

newly smoothed clay. "Mother! Mother! Mother!" Even now his heart found an echo to that far-off bitter cry. Then a woman had come, this woman who alone could understand, and had taken him in her arms and had comforted him.

Threats had not moved him, revilings had but strengthened his resolve, but now he was minded to drop this case. After all, what was it to him?

Then into the turmoil of his thoughts the figure of old Nancy came. "They shall not trouble you again" had been his words to her; and neither could he bear to seem to quail—to bow his head meekly to the power of Griggs and Shaw and to recant his words to them! What would his grandfather have said to such a course as that? Was not right still right, and who but a coward would shrink when, forsooth, the duty grew painful. Slowly he drew his thoughts together, the woman watching the contending emotions in his face with a harrowing interest.

"Tell Luke——" he began and hesitated, it was so hard to say the words to this sad-eyed, expectant soul—"Tell Luke that he had best come in and give himself up to the Sheriff."

The woman gasped for breath. "And go ter ther penertenchery!" she almost screamed.

"And go to the penitentiary, if it must be so," he answered sadly. "I will do my best for him, Mrs. Binns—indeed I will. I would save him if in honour I could! I will tell the Judge about him and about you. I——"

The woman rose. "Le's we be gwine, Parmeely," she said hopelessly. "Hit were jes' like yer pappy tole us hit 'ud be—hit warn't no use ter come, an' Billy Mayson he have fergot."

They turned to the door, but Billy stopped the child and pressed a dollar into her hand.

"If you will not listen to me, at least get something to eat," he urged.

The woman drew herself up. "Give him back his money, Parmeely," she said sternly, "an' put down them apples thar! I didn't come ter yer fer money, Billy," she continued, freighting each slow word with a stinging reproach, "nur did I come fer apples, nuther!"

Billy went to his dinner with a heavy heart. She was only a tenant-farmer's wife—poor and friendless and old—but that made it the harder for him. If she could but strike sharply in return he would not mind so much, he thought. As it was, he knew her class—knew that she would never understand, knew that in her mind, always, he would rank as one who had sold a lifelong friend for a lawyer's retaining-fee.

Maum Tempe's viands seemed tasteless that day and the dainty dessert which she had prepared especially for him went altogether untouched. That thin child's face was haunting him, and he recalled with a sudden and overwhelming pity her hungry, longing look at the heap of rejected apples. How could he have let them go like that!

Then he pictured to himself their probable condition. Luke, their chief breadwinner, was gone; the woman herself had said that the crop for this year was a failure; Long Jerry Binns was worthless. How would they live when the winter winds began to blow? Whence would come their food and their scant coarse clothing? Who would comfort yonder half-starved child when she cried aloud in the night?

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Billy's means were not great—his unpopularity had already lessened his law practice—but he drew an envelope from his pocket and, resting it beside his plate, made a rapid calculation. The new books which he had decided to buy would have to go, of course, and last season's clothing must be forced to do duty again. But he breathed deeply in relief when he found that he could "make ends meet." He had not the least idea that Mrs. Binns would take anything from his hands—her action in his office had plainly showed her mind as to that—but it had occurred to him that through Mrs. Chambliss and Annie he might without revealing himself see that she had no need.

So forcibly did the thought take possession of him and so anxious did he become to put his plan into operation that he could not wait, and when he had arisen from the table he straightway procured a horse and set out for the Chambliss place. He wanted to see Annie, too, he thought, and to tell her about this thing which had arisen to trouble him. Annie would understand—she always understood—and would help him. Surely he had done right in this matter, yet it would seem good to have Annie tell him so.

The sun was just setting when he came to that pleasant lane which leads past the orchard and on up to the gate of the Chambliss house; the cattle—black and red and dun and spotted—were coming home across the hills; and the Negroes chanted mournfully as they brought in their "baskets" from the whitening cotton fields.

"I'm gwine erw-a-a-y ter leave you now!
I'm gwine erw-a-a-y ter leave you now!
Oh, won't you come erlong?"

"De night done co-o-ome, my own true love !
De night done co-o-ome, my own true love !
De night done co-o-ome, my own true love !
An' I am comin' home !"

The young man stopped his horse. So they had chanted in days aforetime in the fields of the Mayson place—so forever they would chant for him in the midst of his happiest dreams. Yonder across the creek and half-hidden by the wooded ridges he could see the oak trees and the tops of the gray old chimneys, and his heart leaped at the sight of his home—his home, for although Archer held the land, no mortgage could give another man his memories.

"Evenin', Mr. Mayson !" Rising from behind the orchard fence, Ben Jim interrupted him with a salutation. "Have me 'take yo' hoss, sah? Miss Annie right up dar on de piazzy. Mos' all de gemmen axes fer Miss Annie. Yas, sah, ole miss up dar, too."

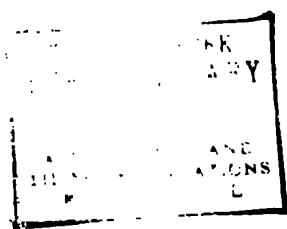
Dismounting and giving his bridle to the lad, Billy walked slowly up the lane. Long before he reached the gate he could see the two sitting on the porch in the purple twilight, awaiting his approach, Mrs. Chambliss in some soft black stuff as became a widow, Annie in clinging, beruffled white, which half hid yet half accentuated the delightful curves of her perfect figure.

The elder woman met him at the gate and took both his hands. She had never had a son, this sweet, wholesome, middle-aged lady, and long ago Billy had in a large measure taken the vacant place.

"It is good to see you," she said. "Other people come to see Annie, but you—ah, you come to see me. I will not believe any otherwise."



" . . . Mrs. Chambliss and Annie sitting on the porch in the purple twilight, awaiting Billy's approach."



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"Both of you, Mis' Ma'y," he replied, caressing her hand. Since his childhood he had called her "Mis' Ma'y" because the Negroes did. "Both of you," he repeated, "since I have so few friends left."

"Ah, that!" she said, snapping her fingers in the direction of Keowee, "there are not many of us left, my boy, but what do we care for such people!"

The young man smiled. Caste prejudice dies hard in a man: in a woman it never dies!

But as soon as he had spoken to Annie, Mrs. Chambliss sent him to his room. "Supper is 'most ready," she explained; "same old room, Billy. I keep it for you just as I used to do, although you use it little enough of late."

"Goin' to do better, Mis' Ma'y!" he called as he vanished through the door.

How homelike that quaint little room seemed to him; how familiar the high old bureau and the great "four-poster" bed. And on the table were some books of his own, left here and long since forgotten.

And then the cozy tea-table, with Annie sitting next him and their fingers touching now and then as, after the informal southern fashion, they passed this dish or that. Is it any wonder that for the time Billy forgot Mrs. Binns and his errand or that he handed the biscuits to Annie somewhat oftener than there was really any need?

But when the meal was ended, and Annie was busy with the china and he and Mrs. Chambliss were alone in the sitting-room, he unfolded his scheme.

"I've got to do something, Mis' Ma'y," he said; "you can see that, can't you? And this is the best that I know."

And then "Mis' Ma'y," with all the dignity of her fifty years and all the tenderness of a mother,

removed her spectacles and drew him down to her and kissed him on the cheek.

"Billy!" she exclaimed, her soft eyes shining as she looked at him, "I'm proud of you, my boy. Oh, you've the making of a man in you, Billy!"

And Billy turned red and stammered, and then his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth and he stood before her speechless.

Annie, who had come to the door and had been watching them, turned away quietly, for that thing for which she had hoped and planned had now come fully to pass. Out on the piazza she sat down and waited. Billy would be going presently—he had said that he must surely return to his office—and after he had finished his talk with her mother she could meet him here and bid him good-night.

But the end of the conference had been reached and Billy was coming out.

"You spoil me, Mis' Ma'y," he was saying; "you make it hard for me to go back to my work."

The girl arose and met him in the door of the hall. "Not going, Billy?" she inquired, as her mother turned back into the room.

The man caught his breath quickly. The soft light was streaming over her and her great dark eyes seemed to hold a message for him. Almost he was minded—— But he dared not take any risk.

"Good-night, Annie!"

For a moment he retained her hand, and her eyes fell and the telltale blood filled all her face with a fleeting rosy colour, but she was in the shadow and he could not see. Once, just before he reached the gate, he stopped and almost turned back to her, then Ben Jim spoke soothingly to the restive horse and he recovered himself and went on.



CHAPTER XXI

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE NIGHT

It was already late when Billy Mayson departed from the gate of the Chambliss house, and as he rode slowly down the lane the lights which he had left behind him went out one by one. Then as he turned into the road the moon rose round and red on the eastern horizon, and he could hear the swamp-owls hooting away down by the bends of the creek. The night, too, was pleasant, the faint breeze blowing out of the west was freshened and cooled by the touch of the gathering dew, and Billy's mind was busy with many things. Before he had reached the brow of the hill the bridle-reins had fallen slack in his hand and the horse picked its way at will along the plain and open road. Then after he had passed the ford and was skirting the edge of the "bottoms," a dog began to howl from the yard of some distant cabin, and old Amos, returning late from a visit to Witch Nancy, saw indistinctly the horse and the shadowy outline of its rider. Amos was old and rheumatism had crippled him, but with Nancy's words still fresh in his memory he turned in his tracks and fled with becoming speed through the long, bare aisles of the corn.

"Mon, I seed him !" he exclaimed, as panting and blown he almost fell into his open cabin door. "He wuz a-gwine ter de big 'ouse !"

"Seed who?" queried his daughter sleepily.

She had been "i'nin'" her "go-to-meetin' frock," and was tired and in no mood to be disturbed.

"Seed old marster! He wuz ridin' thoo de bottoms. Sump'n nuther gwine happen, chile—sump'n nuther gwine happen shore!"

"Sperrits!" ejaculated the woman briefly. "You is seein' sperrits an' hit's a-gwine ter fetch yer bad luck. Go 'long ter bed!" And the old man went away mumbling and trembling.

But Billy, never thinking of Amos, went on, and the "bottoms" dropped behind, and as he rode his mind wove fancies of the things that might have been—of Annie and of the Mayson place and of home-comings at eventide. Then the horse stopped, and waking suddenly from his reverie, the young man saw looming up in the dim, misty light the well-remembered front of his grandfather's house. For a few moments he sat regarding it with surprise. There was a light shining through the blind of one of the first-floor windows, but he took no notice of that. It seemed a long time since he had left the Chambliss farm—how was it that he had come so short a distance, and why had his horse brought him here instead of choosing the shorter way that led off through the white oak ridges and so into the Bellville road? His frame of mind was that in which a small thing becomes a momentous question.

Suddenly, however, he heard behind him the sound of a horse's hoofs ringing steadily on the hard, dry surface of the road. Evidently some one was approaching, and a sorry tale it would be, he thought, for the neighbourhood gossips to mouth, that Billy Mayson had been seen in the night-time mooning about his lost plantation. Just opposite him a little path diverged from the main road, and thinking

to avoid the passer, he turned his horse into this, riding away quietly and bending low to escape the branches of the cherry-trees beneath which his new route led.

The passing man was closer than Billy had thought, and looked at him inquiringly; an overhanging bough brushed his face lightly and filched all unheeded a handkerchief from the pocket of his loose summer coat; a prowling fox stopped, glanced backward at him, and slid away into the shadows, but he did not leave the path until he had travelled fully the half of a mile. Then, as he came again into the open and turned into the hard-trodden Bellville road, he heard away in the direction of Keowee the quick hoarse whistle and the heavy roar of the passing midnight train. The horse pricked up his ears at the sound and the young man used the spur, for he was sleepy now that his dreams had spent themselves. Gathering up his reins he touched the horse again and pushed on toward the court-house town.

But back in drowsy Keowee the "up" train, now labouring on the steep grades that lead across the hills, had lightened itself of a man—a man who, all unseen by the solitary station-master, slipped furtively into the shadows and hugged a wall closely until he was well past the corner of the street. Had the station-master seen this man he might perhaps have recognised him, for only six days before a certain person journeying to Lower Rehoboth had stopped off here, albeit that Bellville was the nearer point, and three days later the same man—some one had said that he was a school-teacher—had returned and had inquired minutely concerning the man called Archer.

"Do you know Mr. Archer?" the station-master had asked in his turn.

"Yes. Oh, yes," the other had answered. "I have known him these many years." Still he had not lingered for old acquaintance's sake, but had bought himself a ticket and had straightway taken his departure.

And after the stranger had gone the station-master had been minded to tell Archer of this person who had been seeking for the money-lender's whereabouts, but Archer did not come often to Keowee now that he had removed himself to the Mayson place, and the station-master, being occupied with the arrival and departure of trains, had presently forgotten. To-night the official signalled the conductor with a quick swing of his lantern and the conductor signalled back to him, and neither of them saw aught of the schoolmaster who was stealing so quietly away.

But the stranger, when once he had reached that street which leads southwest from the square, did not halt nor even hesitate, but moved on hurriedly past the warehouses and past that office which had once been Archer's, and came in the light of the rising moon into the long road that winds through the pines and stretches across the ridges. For two years now he had taught the little school at Lower Rehoboth and his years were telling upon him. At the coming of the warm spring days, the putting forth of the leaves and the upspringing of the tender grass he had turned his footsteps homeward, and with the autumn, when the sun-rays grew long and slant and the woodlands were tinged with blood, he had come south to do his work.

His work—— How little he had thought as he

bade Isaac good-by what the nature of his task might be. And yet, all summer long there had been echoes in his crumbling house—voices that seemed to say "Ten miles south of the Cumberland, in the woods of Tennessee!"

But he had thrust the thought aside and had come away to teach his school. And then he had fallen asleep and the train had passed his station, and he had alighted in Keowee—alighted to see framed in a window the dark face of a man whom he knew.

Afterward he had given up his school, had tried to go away—had tried honestly and with all his heart—but the dead had cried aloud for justice and the gravestones had mocked his dreams. So now he had come again, and as he walked the light breeze sweeping through the wayside trees seemed to whisper to him in an insistent monotone:

"The woods——! The woods and rising sun, and a dead man lying in the chinkapins! Strike! Smite! Strike very quickly and spare not!"

Then a wave of passion engulfed him and he thrust his hand within the breast of his coat and gripped something there, and a wild, strange cry burst hoarsely from his lips, for he saw in the shimmering moonlight the long road leading south, the dark clefts of the ravines, and the red blood from his brother's veins staining the fallen leaves. Lost to all that surrounded him, he ran for a space, and was conscious only of the road and of his own grim errand which waited beside the way. Finally he calmed himself.

And then as the moon rose higher and as he came to the top of a hill the man saw lying before him, all softened in the vague and tenuous light, that house where after all the years he had at last marked

down his enemy. Softly now, softly, lest an alarm be raised. With an excess of caution he left the road and stole cat-like along the hedges. At the garden fence he halted, listened, crossed stealthily, and came to a window where a light shone through.

All unconscious of the presence of any man save himself, Archer lay wakeful upon his bed. Somehow as never before the past was with him to-night and he could not sleep. And because of the disquieting darkness and because of the shadows that troubled him he had relighted his lamp and was suffering it to burn. Just in front of his door Wilson's John should have been asleep on a pallet—Wilson's John, the big yellow Negro whom he had hired in Abram's place—and Archer never knew that two full hours before, Wilson's John had stolen away to the quarter and with a Negro's easy carelessness had left a door unlocked. The money-lender was not afraid—not even when memories of the dead came trooping back to him—but his thoughts held the mastery, and they wandered where they would, dragging him after them.

"One!" The clock in the hall struck the hour, and turning on his pillow he fell into a troubled doze. "One! Two!" A door creaked and he awoke with a start.

"What! What!" he exclaimed, and then as the door of his chamber swung slowly he sprang to his feet, white and trembling. "You?" he shrieked. "You?" For the moment he stood transfixed and incapable of motion.

The man in the doorway, white-lipped and stern but very quiet now, stepped inside and raised his hand ominously. "Ay!" he answered, his deep and resonant voice filling all the room. "It is I. Are

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you well, oh, Ezra Croull? Do your days pass pleasantly? Does life seem to you a sweet thing and a goodly? It is my wish that this should be so!"

Archer, looking upon his visitor with staring eyes, shook like a palsied man. Suddenly he found voice.

"Help! Help! Help!" he screamed, shrinking back to the wall and shuddering.

"Call!" said the intruder, mockingly. "The cabins are distant and a Negro's sleep is sound, but still some one may hear you—some passer on the road, it may be, or some wakeful one among the farm-hands."

His hand moved quickly to his hip, and when it rose again the lamplight gleamed from the polished steel barrel of a weapon.

"Call!" he continued. "The sound of a footfall, the softest click of a latch—yes, even the squeak of a timorous mouse foraging behind yonder wall—will be sufficient to send you headlong into eternity. Stop!"

For even as the other spoke Archer had cleared half the room at a bound. In his table drawer he, too, had a pistol. Could he but clutch that in his hand——!

But just as his hand reached the knob of the door the other man stayed him and he sank shivering into a chair. For ten minutes he sat dumb and immovable, then with a strained and furtive glance his eye sought the window, only to see that it was latched. Before he could loose the fastening—— In his disappointment he bared his teeth and turned upon his captor like an animal at bay.

"Coward!" he sneered hysterically. "I have no

chance! You dare not give me a chance! Coward! Coward!"

The other laughed, but answered: "*He* had no chance!" he muttered almost to himself, "but *you*—you shall have yours! You shall kill me if you are strong enough, Ezra. Would to God you had killed me that morning. But you will not be able—no, you will not be able!" He leaned forward and his voice sank lower. About them there was stillness—only the rustle of the night wind in the leafy vines broke the appalling silence. "I am come to watch with you," he went on in a whisper, "to watch with you against the day of your burial. To-morrow they will dig you a grave, Ezra—Sam had no grave—and the red earth will fall on your coffin, and you will not care, Ezra—you will not care! . . . It is past midnight now, but we will watch and we will consider the olden times. Do you remember, Ezra, how we played—you and I and Sam—how the squirrels chattered in the beech-woods and the sun rose over the hills and the partridges piped in the corn? Do you remember the old songs that my mother sang? Do you remember how she smoothed our beds—yours, Ezra, as well as mine?"

And then, because his conscience was pricked, Archer fell suddenly into the recklessness of rage and cursed the boy who had escaped him and the woman who had nourished him.

"Shoot!" he cried with a snarl; "shoot and have done!"

But his adversary, now that the end was at hand, could not be stirred to any haste, but stood talking of the woods, of the sun just touching the tops of the trees, and the dead man quivering at the

murderer's feet. And then, filled with a wolfish courage, Archer sprang upon his tormentor and clutched with his long and sinewy fingers at the pistol and at his adversary's throat; but that adversary thrust the money-lender off and drew from somewhere about himself the two knives which he had brought. One of these he kept and one he placed in Archer's hand.

And as he felt the glad touch of the weapon the money-lender threw himself upon his assailant and almost beat him down, and the old lust of killing came back to him and he sought no more to escape; but the schoolmaster, watching him, avoided his onset and went warily, yet ever coming nearer and nearer. And when he had drawn very near he stopped, and the two regarded each other, their eyes meeting vengefully and giving back hate for hate. And in a moment Archer leaped and his long fingers caught the schoolmaster's throat and his knife flashed and bit and flashed and bit again, and the schoolmaster reeled drunkenly and thrust once with a turn and a quick upstroke of the wrist. And Archer with the victory almost in his grasp, straightened unnaturally and stiffened and fell, a limp and huddled shape on the floor at the other's feet.

For a moment that other stood looking upon him; then like a man awaking from a troubled dream he went to the window and, unlatching it, stepped out into the cool, sweet morning air. There the signs of life and of the coming day were already to be seen; the dawn was in the east, the bright stars were growing pale, and the birds in the trees and the thickets were beginning to bestir themselves.

"One! Two! Three! Four!" The clock in the hall rang out its alarm to him, but he gave no heed, for a

red mist was before his eyes and the whole earth seemed to whirl. With faltering footsteps he sought the gate and passed out into the road.

"Home!" he muttered; "home!"

For a mile he kept to the road, but when he came to a disused plantation track that led across the woodlands and down toward the bends of the creek he turned into that. He could scarcely have told why he did so, for he was not thinking—he knew only that he was sick unto death and that he was going on—but some old savage instinct deep-hidden in all men and now outcropping in death sent him out into lonely ways to hide his misery, his crime and himself. He saw before him the trees, caught in his nostrils the odour of the damp and rotting leaves, and—then he forgot. Just yonder the old house amidst the roses was, and his mother was there—on the steps—and she was calling him. And behind him, all dim and wrapped close in the trailing gray of the morning mist, the skeleton Death was following him. Ah, he must hurry now!

Rapidly and stumblingly he followed the rough wagon-track down the ragged hillside and out through the willow trees that shaded the "bottoms," and then the last star went out and the mists rose higher and the shadow of Death passed by and stood at the rude log bridge awaiting him. But to the man labouring onward and reeling with weariness there was no hillside, no swamp, no stars!

"Coming, mother; coming!" he cried. Then at the bridge he stopped.

Was it only the white chill mist that touched him and made him shudder so? Suddenly he lurched forward and fell and red froth gathered about his lips.

"Water! Water!" For one moment his awful thirst had brought his errant senses back. Down beneath the bridge the water was running deep and sweet and cool. How it mocked him with its lappings and its gurglings!

Could he get down there? He must try, he thought. With a mighty effort he rolled himself to the edge of the bridge and then, still rolling, fell through the dank weeds and down to the muddy brink.

"Water!" How good it was! He dabbled his hands in it thirstily and submerged his face and drank. Then the stream slipped away from him—and he heard his violin—and it was night—and look! oh, look at the moonlight and the blossoming roses! . . . And then the campfires were alight in the valley and the dark shadows lay in the pines, and the bugles—the far, sweet bugles—were bidding the world good-night. With one last effort he raised his head to listen to them.

"Taps!" he murmured; "taps! There—will—be—no—reveille!"

Back at the Mayson place the sun came slowly up and the mules in the "horse-lot" greeted it with long-drawn brayings, for its rising marked their breakfast hour—the time when fodder was brought to the stall and ten sound ears of yellow corn. With whoop and halloo the plowhands issued from their cabins and gave answer to the calling of the mules, while the smoke from Aunt Clairsey's kitchen was already mounting in a thin blue column straight up toward the sky.

"Mornin', Unk' Amos! Top o' de mornin' ter yer." Wilson's John, fresh from his rest in Slow

Lewis Hudgen's cabin, spoke cordially as he passed the old man who was sitting on the crooked "lot" fence watching the younger men "feed."

"Whar yer been?" demanded Amos grumpily. Wilson's John was not a "Mayson nigger," and Amos had no patience with any who had been bred elsewhere. "How come yer ain't up at dat big 'ouse?"

"Oh, I gits lonesome up dar," answered the younger man airily. "I slep' down ter Lewis' house las' night."

Slow Lewis came past the corner of the barn with a "turn" of fodder in his arms. "I b'leeve John is feerd ter sleep up dar," he remarked with a laugh. "John say dey is sperrits up dar."

The yellow man turned his head slightly sidewise and pulled at the kinks in his beard. "I ain't 'zac'ly feerd," he replied, "not whut yer mout call *feerd*, but my mine doan' res' at hit's ease."

Amos descended from the fence and wagged his gray head mysteriously. "Hump!" he ejaculated, "eff you had seed whut I is you'd sho' 'nuff be oneasy."

Lewis stopped and dropped his fodder. "Whut is yer seed, Unk' Amos?" he asked with interest.

But Amos, feeling his own importance, desired further coaxing. "Num mine!" he answered, still shaking his head. "I is seed whut I is seed, an' I seed hit las' night, too! I wouldn't stay in dat house yander! No, sir! You couldn't pay me 'nuff!"

With a nervous laugh Wilson's John turned away. However willing he might be to stand and gossip with the field-hands, it was getting late and the hot water for his master's shaving had not yet been brought.

"Howcome dat ar winder open?" he soliloquised

as he turned the corner of the house. "De boss doan' open dat winder—not inginerly he don'! Boss up yit?" This to Aunt Clairsy, who looked out through the kitchen door.

"I dunno. I ain't heerd him." The old woman gave a comprehensive glance at the heavens and went back to beating her biscuit dough.

Left to himself, the other approached the open window and looked in cautiously. "My God, men!" he screamed in affright, "come here! Fer God's sake, come here quick!"

Hearing the outcry, Lewis came from the "lot" at a run, with Amos and the others trailing behind him, and in a very few moments the whole plantation was astir.

"I tole yer so!" gasped Amos, "I seed ole marster een de bottom a-ridin' 'long de aidge o' de co'n. De hoss dat he rid wuz a pale hoss an' de moonlight shined thoo his ribs!"

Then even in the midst of their excitement a great fear gripped the Negroes and held them. The man here was dead—dead, no doubt, because of his sins—but who could say who had killed him? Presently the white men would come—the white men who in a time like this slay first and reason afterward—and it might be that these whites would call the Negroes to a swift account. At the thought the black faces grew gray and they drew apart from each other and stood in silence.

"Lo'd he'p us!" cried old Amos at last. Then some one caught the rope of the farm bell and began to ring furiously.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ARREST AND WHAT IT BROUGHT ABOUT

IN an hour after the ringing of the bell at the Mayson place a heterogeneous crowd had gathered in the old house and in the yard. Smooth-faced merchants and sallow clerks were there, lean and muscular farmers, and "poor whites" slow of speech and of motion. Excepting those who belonged on the place, the Negroes were conspicuously absent. It is not good to loiter about white men after a man of their kind has been slain.

Shaken with fear, the plantation blacks were huddled in a group and over them a man with a gun stood guard. In truth, their position was a precarious one. A hot-head with a rope might easily have precipitated a wholesale murder. Archer was dead—so much was evident, and it was equally evident that some one must speedily be punished. Else who could say what white man might not be stricken next.

Luckily for Wilson's John and his fellows, appearances were somewhat in their favour. Usually when a Negro kills he robs, and there was no trace of a robbery here. Besides, there had been a fight—chairs were overturned and the dead man held a knife still clutched in his cold, stiff hand. Near the window was another such a knife—both weapons were comparatively new and were of a pattern quite uncommon in the Keowee country. Then, too, the

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previous good characters of the Negroes had to be considered, and the want of likelihood that without exception each one of them would join in such a horrid business. Therefore, since all the circumstances seemed to acquit the blacks, each man looked into his neighbour's face and asked breathlessly "Who?"

Almost as if in answer to this puzzling question vague whisperings began to pass from man to man. It was recalled that Billy Mayson, at the last term of the court, had publicly threatened Archer; moreover, who else had such a weighty reason for wishing the money-lender harm? But two motives were strong enough to prompt such a murder—robbery or revenge, and this was certainly no robbery. Besides, it was like a Mayson—like the old breed, which held a record for duelling—to give a man a chance to fight for his life. Archer had been given such a chance, so the matched knives seemed to say.

Then a more ominous rumour began to spread. Tony Wilkerson's child had been sick last night, and some time between eleven o'clock and twelve Tony on his way to fetch the doctor had ridden past the Mayson place. Then, just as he reached the front of the house, he had seen a man sitting on a horse—a man who rode away hurriedly and did not speak—but Tony, by the light of the late-risen moon, had recognised the loiterer and now said that it was indeed Billy Mayson. As the story diffused itself the men gathered excitedly into little knots and the Negroes were almost forgotten. In the centre of one of the groups Larkin was protesting indignantly.

"It doesn't stand to reason, men," he said, "that Billy Mayson did this awful thing. Why, you

all know the boy! You don't believe this! You can't!"

There had been a time when Larkin's words were heeded by the folk of the neighbourhood, but of late he had in some sort shared Billy Mayson's unpopularity. Still there were signs among the older men that his opinion would find a support. Perhaps Wilkerson had been mistaken, reasoned some. The moonlight is often deceiving, and it might well be that Wilkerson had seen some other man after all. In all the groups the discussion waxed hot, each advancing his view.

But just as the wrangling was at its height a man came up from the direction of the road and the cherry-trees holding a square of white linen gingerly between his fingers. Reaching the crowd, he handed his find to Perry, who just then was making some remark, and Perry, after a quick look, started, then spread the cloth so that all could see. It was a freshly laundered handkerchief bearing upon its border the initials "W. G. M."

As he read the letters Larkin's own heart failed him, for this new piece of evidence seemed to clench the matter. Still he argued on stubbornly until the voices of the others overbore him.

"If he's innocent he will have it to prove!" said a man named Tolleson, loudly. Tolleson dealt in groceries and Archer had been his customer: it was annoying to have a good business thus rudely and unreasonably interrupted.

"Wire for the Sheriff," suggested Perry, struggling between awe and excitement. "Wire to Bellville for the Sheriff and the Coroner."

"I shall swear out a warrant for Mayson's arrest!" answered Tolleson vengefully; "Keowee can't stand



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such work as this! S-a-ay, you'd about as well turn those niggers loose, I guess. We've located the right man now."

So there was running to and fro, and the telegraph was called into service, and the W. U. operator at Bellville stared and then disbelieved as, listening to the clicking of his instrument, he "took down" the urgent messages.

But Billy, tired by his journey of the preceding night, slept late that morning, waked, listened to the sparrows twittering under his window, and slept again. Later Jake came, much aggrieved, to call the young man's attention to certain bells, and the young man abjured Jake in violent language. But presently he arose and ate and went about his business for the day. He had the case against "*Simpkins et al.*" thoroughly in hand, but a few days before a Negro client had partaken of the flesh of a neighbour's hog forcibly and without the owner's consent, and Billy foresaw trouble with the jury. It was just nine o'clock, and he was deep in this unhopeful case, when Login limped into the office.

"Billy!" he exclaimed, "Archer's dead—killed last night. I wish to God you'd read that!"

Billy sprang up in astonishment. "What?" he ejaculated. "Oh, no!"

"Read!" said Login impatiently, pointing to the yellow scrap of paper which he had flung upon the table.

Billy picked up the telegraph form and ran his eye over the scrawl.

"BELLVILLE.

"——— *Login, Sheriff*: John Archer killed last night. Evidence W. G. Mayson guilty. Arrest.

Bring to Keowee next train. Compare message
Coroner.

“(Signed) R. F. GLIMP, Constable.”

“That’s the work of some of them scoundrels down there!” roared Login hotly. “Why, man, you haven’t even been out of town!”

Billy’s face paled slightly. “It’s preposterous, of course,” he replied. “I haven’t seen Archer since court week in June. But I did pass the old house last night. I ate supper with the Chamblisses and came back by the Mayson place. Somebody saw me—a man passed just as I left—and they’ve got the matter mixed, I guess.”

“Mixed nothing!” snapped Login. “They’re just determined to clear Simpkins by fair means or foul. They want to get you out of the case—the dirty crew that they are!”

Billy laughed. “Well, we’ll go down and see what they are about,” he remarked.

But two hours later, when they had reached Keowee and had driven out to the Mayson house, a great fear took the place of the wrath in Login’s breast. He had been talking since his arrival to the men of the neighbourhood, had heard a *résumé* of the evidence upon which the call for Billy’s arrest had been based, and it seemed to him—albeit he was a hopeful man—that the outlook was dark. Of Billy’s innocence he felt as sure as he did of his own, but with all these damning circumstances grouping themselves about him could the young man establish that innocence—could he make it clear to a judge and a jury that Archer’s most outspoken enemy had no hand in the money-lender’s violent death? Almost he was afraid to talk to Billy.

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About the two, as they stood beneath a tree in the yard, a crowd had gathered. Elsewhere the talk went excitedly, but in the presence of the accused there were no words other than those of subdued and casual greetings. Men came and looked upon this grandson of their old neighbour and sighed and passed on. Up on the long, old piazza, where Billy and his mother had loitered together in the summer evenings, and just at the head of the wooden steps over which from time immemorial men of the Mayson blood had daily passed up and down, the Coroner was empanelling his jury of "twelve good men and true." Across the dusty road—a road now encumbered with vehicles and tethered animals—the stone wall, gilded by the noonday sun and barred by the shadows of the trees, stood guard above the quiet graves.

With a look in his eyes that no man could fathom Billy gazed at the wall and bit his lips; then he faced the crowd again and stood upright and impassive. If indignant passion was raging in his heart, if with this passion a sickening fear had come creeping upon him and benumbing him, at least this rabble who had come to gaze at him curiously should never know. In a moment his face relaxed, half mechanically his hand sought pipe and tobacco, and seating himself at the roots of the oak he watched the passing people and waited.

Out of the press of the crowd Larkin came up to him and shook his hand. "They've gone crazy, I think," he remarked cheerfully. "But it's all right, Billy. We will be sure to get the matter straight in a day or two. The thing is new to-day, and they've found a coincidence and think it to be a proof; they'll know better by to-morrow. This

jury'll go against you, of course, but it is just a coroner's affair. New evidence will turn up to-morrow and then I will go on your bond and they'll release you."

Billy started. The insistent hopefulness of Larkin's words had revealed a great deal to the young man—he must be in a desperate case indeed, he thought, to require such comforting as that, and for the first time, too, he realised that he would almost certainly be committed to jail. In his absorption in the graver features of the matter he had forgotten entirely the inconveniences and indignities which would necessarily accompany this charge. For a moment rebellion surged madly within him. He would not go! Here he would stand with his feet planted firmly on Mayson soil and his back set hard against a Mayson oak and let that man touch him who dared.

Then realising his folly, he laughed. "Thank you, old friend," he replied. "I scarcely know yet what I will do. Just now I was thinking that I would refuse to move from this spot. I am a little dazed to-day, I think. Will you come up to-morrow to Bellville—to the jail?" At the last word his pent-up wrath almost mastered him. "By heaven," he added angrily, "I'll make somebody sorry for this day's work!"

But the jury had taken their seats and Wilkerson was testifying. Briefly and with no shadow of feeling the man told of his ride during the preceding night, of its course, and of what he had seen as he passed the Mayson house. After him came the doctor, who discoursed learnedly on punctures, lacerations and contusions and the immediate causes of the same. Finally the handkerchief was

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shown and he who had found it told of the circumstance. All the testimony was brief and informal. Later—at the meeting of the Circuit Court, where instead of prosecuting Simpkins Billy Mayson would himself be tried—the State's attorney would have witnesses ready to say that Billy had threatened the money-lender, that ill-feeling had existed on account of the mortgage, and that Mayson had by no means ridden directly from the Chambliss farm to Bellville as a man intent on his business naturally ought to have done. Also he would elicit detail by detail everything which these principal witnesses could possibly be induced to tell. But now, at the "sitting" of the Coroner, the barest outline of a case was thought to be sufficient.

"What about it, Billy?" asked both Larkin and Login as the last witness ended his story.

Billy looked at them as if he were troubled. "Every one of them told the truth," he said. "I was here, I saw Wilkerson, and that is my handkerchief. They're going to give me trouble, Login."

"It's a bad business!" muttered Login hopelessly. "Bad!"

"Oh, well," interrupted Larkin, with an easiness which he by no means felt, "we've got to get to work. We've got to find the man who did this and then you'll have no trouble. Keep up your courage, Billy, and we will get you out of this scrape yet."

But in spite of Login's efforts to treat the matter lightly, depression soon settled gloomily upon Billy, and after the "commitment" to prison had been handed to Login the friends parted, Larkin to go to his farm, Login and Billy to take the night

train into Bellville. Just as he was preparing to ride away Larkin called the Sheriff aside.

"Where are you going to put him, Tom?" he asked, indicating the younger man by a nod; "that jail is a devil of a hole!"

"Oh, Jackson'll let him have a room with him," replied Login reassuringly; "if that was all the trouble I'd rest easy."

Jackson was Login's jailer and occupied very pleasant rooms situated in the front part of the prison.

Larkin hesitated, cleared his throat and spoke again, this time in a very low tone. "What chance?" he asked.

Login groaned. "It'll take a miracle to clear him," he answered. "It'll be manslaughter at the best; at the worst it'll be murder. The whole county is dead against him to start with."

"Well, they've got me to fight before they convict him," returned the other decisively. "I am not going to rest until I find out the truth about the thing. By the way, it is going to lose you some votes, your standing in with Mayson and myself."

"Votes be blanked!" replied the Sheriff profanely.

Inside the house, just within the door of the same library room in which he had first drawn his mortgage, the dead man lay in his coffin and, with the idle curiosity characteristic of their class, the poor whites crowded about it. Now and then one would tire of this gazing into that still and waxen face and would retire, but always there was another ready to take the vacated place. Out in the hallway two watchers were sitting with Tolleson. Archer had been a solitary man and had no intimates, but business relations had existed between himself and



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Tolleson and it was by virtue of this slender tie that the merchant was in charge of the old house and of the dead.

At the end of the inquest, and after the commitment of Billy Mayson to the county jail had become an assured fact, many of the assembled people had gone quietly away, but the poor whites, eager to enjoy the excitement up to its uttermost moment, had lingered. Besides, it had been whispered that after nightfall Tolleson would distribute strong waters among all those who remained with the corpse.

"Archer wuz a putty good man," remarked Jason Simpkins to a knot of his cronies who, grown weary of the house, had assembled themselves comfortably on the shady side of the barn, "a sight too good a man ter be butchered up this here way."

"He war ruther clost wi' his money," said Wes' Teddards musingly; "leas'ways, I'se heern tell 'at he wuz."

"That he mout ha' been—hit war his'n—but when we went ter 'im ter git money ter he'p pay Johnson he loant hit. 'Ef yer need mo', Simpkins,' he says, 'why, yer kin jes' come an' git hit.' An' now this yer Mayson have kilt him—this yer same man whut is a-tryin' ter penertencher us!"

A murmur of resentment ran through the crowd at the mention of Billy's name.

"Mayson air putty apt ter hang, hain't he?" inquired Teddards solicitously.

Jason answered scornfully. "Naw!" he said; "ef he wuz er pore man like you an' me is he'd swing fer shore, but bein' ez he air a Mayson folks 'lows 'at he's better'n us common run an' he'll jest be turnt a-loose. I seed that ole cuss Larkin an'

Tom Login a-jugglin' together to-day. I'll be boun' they's a-workin at hit a'ready. Hit's a blamed shame—that's whut hit is! Thar ain't no jestice in hit!"

"Ef hit had been one o' us thar wouldn't ha' been no trile," remarked one of the men bitterly; "thar'd ha' been a hangin' right yere ter-day."

"Oughter be one yit!" ejaculated the crafty Jason. "Ef I jest knowed who'd foller me I'd—— But it hain't no use ter talk! You-all is 'umble, you is! Any man whut wants ter kin tromple on you-all an' yer darsn't hit back at him. Mayson 'ull come out clur o' this in plenty o' time ter sen' we-all ter ther pen. Yeh! Yer'll be glad o' that, I reckon!"

"That man had oughter be hung," rejoined Teddards angrily. "I'll jes' go as far as any man todes that, too. Kin anybody say I has ever flickered yit when ther time come?"

"Thar hain't nary one of us flickered," added another in a challenging tone.

Jason saw his opportunity. In the eyes of the poor whites Billy was more than an enemy. Having been reared their neighbour, he was a traitor to his friends, and being a white man he was a traitor to his race. And now this aristocrat who had denied their claims upon him—this lawyer who was pressing men of his own colour so mercilessly to the wall, was himself taken redhanded and lay charged with a cowardly crime. Had he killed Archer in an open fight friends and even admirers would not have been lacking, but to crawl in the night, to strike at no risk and in silence—Keowee had no scorn too deep for such a man! For a moment the group in the shadow of the barn stood looking at one another



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startled and fearful. In every mind a hideous thought had arisen. Men had been lynched ere this for less grievous crimes than cold-blooded, midnight murder, and it seemed to them that their revenge might safely be had. Wes' Teddards licked his thick lips thirstily and thrust the coarse and matted hair back from his retreating forehead.

"Is any o' you boys got licker?" he asked in a husky voice.

Jason drew out a bottle and held it up to the sun, a foxy glitter creeping up into his eyes. "I drinks," he said, "an' I rides—I rides inter Bellville ter-night!"

He handed the bottle to Teddards, looking sharply into the other's face.

For a second Teddards quailed, then he recovered and raised the drink to his lips. "Here's at you!" he called.

"Drink hearty," replied Simpkins hoarsely; "drink hearty an' pass the bottle on."

"Drink," repeated Teddards to the next man, "an' go talk ter them other men. How many does yer reckon we'll need ter-night, Simpkins?"

"Twenty 'ull do," answered Jason in an undertone, "but we wants all we kin git. Ther mo' we has ther less dang'us hit air gwine ter be. Bob, you better ride over ter Keowee an' git some mo' licker. Hit mout be 'at we'll need hit."

Taking the money which Jason offered him, the messenger departed hastily, and after he was gone the others, fired now by the whisky with which Jason had not ceased to ply them, disseminated themselves among the diminished crowd, calling men of their kind aside and whispering with them and arguing. No practised eye was required to discern the fact that grave mischief was "in the wind,"

but the steadier men had gone to their homes and there were none left to check this rising tide of sudden and unreasoning passion.

"Yas," cried Jason exultingly, seeing that his heaven was promptly beginning to work, "that cuss he rid high ez long ez he could, but ther stoppin' place is done come fer him."

One of the watchers by the dead, a Keowee man, old and conservative, went in hastily to Tolleson. "Those roughs out there are getting ugly," he said; "you had best shut off the whisky or we may have to wire Login a warning."

"Oh, it amounts to nothing," replied Tolleson easily, "and it is none of our business anyway."

Half an hour later Jason and Teddards again met in the shadow of the barn, but they failed to see old Amos who had come to feed the mules, for Amos was inside a stable and the stable wall stood between.

"Git ther men off, Wes," ordered Jason; "tell 'em ter scatter an' ter keep thur blamed mouths shet better'n they is a-doin' less'n they spile ther game. They had better meet at ther cross-roads above my house. Tell 'em not ter git nobody else—thar's about forty of 'em now an' that is plenty. Keep 'em quiet, Wes, an' tell 'em to scatter till ther time comes. Then, by George, we'll move, an' we'll sen' that cussid Billy Mayson whar he is sont ole Archer to!"

Still talking, they passed on out of earshot, and Amos, crouching low behind the stable wall, fell to trembling violently.

"They's atter Mars' Billy," he muttered hopelessly; "they'll git Mars' Billy shore!"

At another time he would have raised an outcry—would have run proclaiming the tidings all the way

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to Keowee, but this fearful day had stunned him and his brain was already sick with numbing terror. When he was sure that Jason had gone he crept out of his hiding-place into the "lot." Hours before, the other Negroes, glad to be left alive, had fled, and it was but the habit of a lifetime which had brought him here to care for the forgotten mules. And now the night was coming on and he could stay no longer—not even for Mars' Billy's sake. Last night "ole marster" had risen from his grave to ride through the lonely "bottoms," and to-night, all rigid, with his heavy black eyebrows blacker still against the waxen pallor of his sphinx-like face, the money-lender who had taken his master's place lay composed and confined just inside the library door.

After such happenings could any one doubt that the "sperrits" would walk, the ghosts hold high carnival, or that shapes and shadowy things would prowl hungrily about the cabins? What could he do? Had not Nancy foretold all this? To Nancy, therefore, he would go. Others might be afraid of her, but she had proved herself friendly to him. Who could be more able than she to hold the supernatural in check? Avoiding the white men who, now grown turbulent with drink, were passing along all the roads, he struck off stealthily into the open fields and, making a wide circuit about the swamp, came in the gathering dusk to the door of Witch Nancy's cabin.

He found the woman alert. All day like a tigress chained she had been pacing her cabin and her yard. That Archer was dead she cared not a whit—she had known that he could but die—but they had seized upon her boy, these fools who knew not how the spirits come to avenge earthly injuries—and

had taken him away to jail. To-morrow she would go to him; he was her boy and she loved him. Somehow she would find help for him. With her bare hands, if need be, she would force those prison gates and release him from the narrow bounds which the white man's law had set—that law which had taken a Mayson's land and which now threatened a Mayson's life.

Then, when amid fear and trembling old Amos told that which he had so recently heard, her anger blazed out afresh. So it was Jason who was threatening—this Jason who lived at the cross-roads—this thief, this night-rider, this troubler of peaceable folk! It was in her mind to go to Jason by night, to take his throat in her black and skinny fingers and to throttle him slowly did the thief bring harm to her boy. But he had not hidden his plan well and she thought to hinder him. Through the gathering night she left her cabin and sped swiftly along the paths. Yonder at the Mayson place the lights of the watchers were beginning to burn and the roads were noisy with poor whites moving on to their rendezvous, but the old woman set her face toward the Chambliss house. Miss Annie was there and Miss Annie was her friend and Billy's.

As she slipped across the road as noiselessly as a flitting shadow two riders passed her by.

"Hurry up!" called one to the other. "Ef yer don't we mout be too late."

"We is ter leave Jason's at ten, hain't we?"

"Yas, an' hit's nigh nine now. Oughter be at ther jail. Look at ther ole huzzy!"

Her gliding form had startled the horse, but before they could hinder her she was over the fence and went running across the cotton rows.



CHAPTER XXIII

ANNIE'S RIDE

SHOCKED as they had been by the mysterious death of the money-lender and the subsequent arrest of Billy Mayson, neither Annie Chambliss nor her mother felt the slightest apprehension as to the latter's ultimate safety. They were perfectly aware that Billy of late had been running counter to the well-known prejudices of the neighbourhood, and they saw in this hideous charge which was now preferred against him merely an evidence of the ill-will toward the young lawyer which pervaded the community and of the too great zeal of some narrow and unreflecting man. That any real evidence could be brought to justify the arrest they did not in the least believe. Hence in thinking of Billy they felt neither fear nor overmuch sorrow—they were simply and sternly indignant.

Nor did they think it necessary for them to revise their opinions when a neighbour going home from the inquest stopped and rehearsed for their benefit the story which had become current there. Wilkerson and the "circumstances" might piece together whatever tale they chose, but these two would never believe it. Knowing Billy, they knew—womanlike—that he was innocent; what need could there be for witnesses?

"Oh, these people!" remarked the elder lady scornfully when the neighbour had taken his leave,

"what fools they are! Do they think to humiliate Billy, I wonder? To lower him in the eyes of his friends? Ah, well, I am old and a journey tires me, but to-morrow I will go to Bellville and I will drive straight to the jail."

"What?" exclaimed Annie in surprise, for her mother was by no means a woman who did unconventional things.

"Yes," she replied; "these people must know that I, at least, have not forsaken the lad."

So, stirred with scornful wrath and venting their feelings in many words, the two endured the long hours which came after the eventful morning. Then as the afternoon drew to a close and the purple shadows began to gather on the hillsides and in the wide, gray cotton fields, they came out upon the porch and sat there listening, for suddenly the roads had grown clamorous with hoof-strokes and with the voices of passing men.

"What does it mean?" they asked, but there was no one who could enlighten them.

"It is nothing," they told themselves at last; "the riff-raff are simply drunk."

But all day Annie's nerves had been overwrought and the unwonted stir had disquieted her more than she cared to admit. Supper time brought an interruption to her foreboding thoughts, but when the meal was ended and her mother, mindful of her intended journey, had gone early to bed, the girl left Julie Ann to look after the house and went out into the yard and stood leaning upon the gate, engrossed in purposeless watching. And although she was a woman not given to foolish fears, the darkness to-night seemed filled with mystery and with vague and unuttered threatenings, for the

noises made by the passers had ceased and out of the south sluggish black clouds were creeping up toward the zenith, blotting with ruthless gloom the dim stars and the pale interspaces of the evening sky.

Then, while still she waited, she heard far out upon the road the regular footfall of another horse, and presently from the field to her right there came a muffled sound as of shuffling, hurrying feet. And even as she looked a shadowy form—a dark figure, long and gaunt and swift—mounted with a vigorous spring to the topmost rail of the high fence beside the lane.

The girl was frightened. Reason seems good in the sunlight but it fails when the dark nights come. As the thing approached she clung to the gate and shivered, and she bit her lips fiercely that she might not scream, but amid it all she held her ground as a daughter of the old stock should.

"Miss Annie!"

"Who is it?" In spite of its tremors her voice rang sharp and challenging.

"Hit's me. Hit's Nancy! Dey is atter my boy! Dey is gone on atter Billy Mayson!" Panting from her exertions, the old woman caught at the gate and held fast to keep from falling.

"Why, Aunt Nancy, how you have startled me! What—— Is there any——"

"Hit's about my boy. Jason Simpkins is a-gwine atter him ter-night. Dem low-down scamps is a-meetin' at dat cross-road right now an' dey's a-gwine right on ter de co'-ouse. Den dey gwine bus' in de do' of de jail an' dey'll jes' take 'im out'n dar an' dey won't give de boy no chanst."

A sickening fear sent the girl reeling backward.

She knew now! She could read the whole malignant scheme, but it was too horrible—it could not be!

Yet with swift and graphic words the old woman went on with the story, and even while she was speaking Jason's evil and pitiless crew were gathering but a few short miles away—gathering to murder Billy Mayson. As the truth forced itself upon her the girl clenched her hands and tried to think surely and rapidly. Keowee? No; Keowee was too slow and the telegraph office there was already closed for the night. Before she could get a message from there it might be entirely too late. But the Sheriff? Jason was afraid of the Sheriff and Login was Billy's friend. With a good horse one might go, trusting nothing to another hand.

"Come!" She grasped old Nancy's wrist and the two ran hastily across the yard. Then as she passed the house she remembered her mother and went more quietly—her mother would be afraid for her and might in some way hinder her. Lightening their footsteps, the two slipped through a partly opened gate and stole away out of the yard. In the kitchen Julie Ann was moving about noisily, and the girl was thankful, since that clatter had covered her departure.

How dark the "lot" was! Gropingly they crept into the barn, found a saddle and a bridle there, shuddered and shrank from the scurrying rats, emerged, and ran on to the stable door. Almost the girl's heart had failed her, but the touch of her horse rubbing its nose against her shoulder reassured her. Then when she had saddled him she led him forth and the gate creaked harshly as they passed out into the lane.



"Go home, Aunt Nancy!" she commanded sharply.

"I goes wid you!" was the witch-woman's steady answer.

"You cannot! It would overburden the horse and I could not travel so fast! Don't you see that one must stay?"

"Den let me——"

"Never!"

Old Nancy would have argued the question, but the girl had already reached the saddle and the big bay horse launched out at a touch and a word. For Annie knew that she could not wait. It was past ten o'clock, Jason and his men were on their way, and the Chambliss farm was much more distant from Bellville than the cabin at the forks of the road. Realising the situation, the witch-woman watched the girl depart, then slipped away into the darkness.

Once out of the narrow lane the horse settled down into a magnificent reaching stride; the girl, patting his shoulder and coaxing him, talked to him as if he were human, for Bellville lay ten miles yonder and the race was for Billy's life. From the cloudy south a mutter of thunder arose and the clouds were mounting higher and higher, but neither woman nor horse heeded the threatening of the elements as they swept madly down the hill and burst through the ford at the creek where for one swift instant a lightning flash lit the heaving face of the deep and troubled water.

At the top of the hill she saw the lights burning at the Mayson place, and a mile farther on she left the road and plunged blindly into the untracked forest land. The darkness was appalling, but

Jason's men were somewhere in the straight road ahead and she must avoid them.

Yonder across this wooded tract there lay another highway and she must reach it if she could. A bough thrust her hat from her head, the rough underbrush dragged at her clothing, and the long branches reached out to her as if with human hands, and in her loneliness and her terror she almost cried aloud, but she kept straight on until at last she reached a cultivated field and struck into the parallel road.

There the pace of the horse, which had been lessened by the softer footing of the untravelled woods, increased again, and by the sheet lightning which now played fitfully the girl saw the roadside bushes bending to the rising wind and the long "snake" fences that were gliding dizzily by. On she went and on, down the slopes, across the streams and up the long red hills, until her good horse reeked with sweat and breathed heavily with fatigue. Then suddenly his shod feet rang with a hollow sound on the long wooden bridge which spans the clear waters of Brightman's.

Half-way! Only half-way! How slowly she had come! She had need to go faster, she thought, and she plied her riding-switch, but the great horse only quivered and made no gain in speed; already he was giving her his best, and as he thundered on the white spume from the frothy bit flew back and wet the reins.

"Faster!" Realising its uselessness, the girl dropped the twig and bent low on the neck of the flying animal, and then the hoof-beats fell a trifle more rapidly and they swept on toward the west.



But on that shorter way which Annie had perforce avoided a long and ghostlike cavalcade was moving silently. The lynchers did not know of her coming, but they were in haste to be quit of their work and they were still far ahead of her. Ordinarily such a gathering makes no secret at all of its doings, but these men did not feel quite safe. That Billy Mayson was at present unpopular they knew, but they knew as well that popular feeling is a most uncertain thing—to-morrow it might veer suddenly and might extend to this man its sympathy. Besides, even as matters stood it was most unlikely that any one so prominent as this lawyer could be done to death openly with no hand raised in his behalf. Login was avowedly his friend and Login was an opponent who had to be reckoned with, while the people of Bellville as a whole would at least lend a hand to protect the man. Then, too, if the deed were done publicly there would have to be a trial, even if it were only a form—so much was due to decency—and Jason and his friends did not wish to be imprisoned again. So they were going rapidly but quietly, and every man had been duly charged to guard the secret well in order that when the hue and cry was raised no outsider might say with certainty whence the blow had come.

Riding at the head of this column Jason felt grimly satisfied. His score against Billy Mason—his list of grievances which had been growing through all these years—was about to be wiped out now. So bitter had the ex-thief's hate come to be that he would have been willing to suffer in his own person could that suffering have brought him revenge upon his enemy. Now the fates had delivered the aristocrat into his hands. How good

it would be to see this unbending man cringe and whimper and shake. How he would taunt him in the hour of his fear and how plain he would make the forecast of the one inevitable end. As for the dead man yonder, the spilling of whose blood had made all this possible—what cared Jason for Archer?

But the leader of the mob was much too shrewd a man to voice his thoughts even to Teddards. Lacking the fact of Archer's death it would have been impossible to move these men, for the lynchings of the southern country have been of slow and subtle growth, and even to-day a sufficient motive for the lawlessness must appear in evidence. Ten years before Jason's effort such action was never tolerated save as a punishment for heinous crimes against women. Good men had then engaged in these very rare uprisings. Afterward they excused themselves and their countrymen sympathised with them. The poor woman had suffered enough, they said; why drag her into publicity and torture her afresh before the courts? So the opinion prevailed that such offenders should die surely and speedily.

Yet, when the barriers of law have been rent the breach tends steadily to widen—enacted statutes take cognisance of motives, but natural tendencies do not. Gradually the idea of protecting the helpless grew wider in its application, and under the mask of caring for the public weal the mobs began to execute murderers—not all murderers, of course, but simply those who had no friends and whose crime was marked by circumstances of a high and aggravated nature. Then, when those good men who had made such lynchings possible by themselves beginning the practice grew afraid and would have checked the more turbulent spirits, they could

not, for fine-drawn distinctions never appeal to the multitude.

It was by reason of the fact that lynchings had grown very common that Jason had been so easily able to organise his particular mob. Billy Mayson was outside the sympathies of the men to whom the ex-thief had appealed—he had refused to allow these or the men with whom these agreed to slip scatheless through the meshes of the law—he had taken the side of the injured Negroes and had turned the white men relentlessly away—and in the end he had murdered Archer. In their own minds it was an even-handed justice which they were preparing to deal out to the offender—a very strict justice which was all the more to be desired since it was pleasantly tintured by a spice of private revenge. But could they have fathomed Jason's thoughts they would have turned away from him—no man cares to play cat's-paw and rake chestnuts for another.

But they did not know, and the line filed over the hills. Sometimes an oath was muttered, or a horse stumbled, or a black bottle shifted from hand to hand and emptied itself with gurglings, but the boisterousness which had marked the afternoon had wholly died away. They felt that they were justified—that there were men who would even applaud this deed—but why tempt Providence? If you hang a man's neighbour he may perhaps forgive you, but you must do this quietly, for if you disturb his slumbers he will execrate you. Jason thought it best that Bellville should sleep to-night in peace.

Along all the hurrying line the conversation took place in whispers.

"Hit's twelve!" remarked Wes' Teddards, peering up at the few stars that yet remained unobscured.

"Yas," replied Jason easily, "twelve; but 'ull be soon enough fer us, an' we 'ull be thar 'fore that time. 'Tain't more'n a mile 'n' a hal mebbe two mile now. Has yer got that rope?"

Wes' looked backward over his shoulder. "Nay," he answered. "I got tired un hit an' I gin hit Wilse Bolin. He air right back thar."

Jason muttered an oath and checked his horse until the man to whom Wes' had directed him came riding alongside. "Got ther rope, Wilse?" he asked.

"Yep! Here she is!" The fellow loosed a coil of new "plow-line" from the horn of his antiquated saddle and swung it at arm's length above his head.

"Hol' on ter hit, then; don't lose hit!"

"Oh, I 'ull keep her, you bet! We is mighty nigh thar, hain't we?"

"Yas, we is jest passed ther Downtin ole place. Thar's plenty o' time. Don't none o' you fellows go ter gittin' brash—hollerin' an' shootin' an' s' like. Ef yer does somebody 'ull shore git hurt."

"Oh, we ain't sich fools as that!"

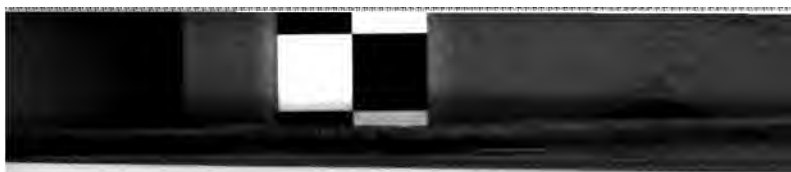
"Wal, I mus' ride on. Look sharp, Wilse, an' keep ther boys study. They-alls aims ter get right, but hit's mighty easy ter fergit." Giving his horse the rein, Jason spurred on to overtake Wes'.

"Find Wilse?" queried the subordinate as the moving spirit again reached his side.

"Oh, yas. Hit's all right—he's got hit!"

"Whut's yer plan fer gittin' in that thar jail whar yer gits thar?"

"Oh, we 'ull jest purtend 'at we is a-fetchin' our pris'ner in. Ef that trick fails we kin break t'other."



door. But I'd ruther not do no breakin'. Hit takes a lot o' time an' hit makes ther dickuns of er fuss. I won't break ef I kin he'p hit."

"Thar's nobody at ther place 'ceptin' Jackson an' his wife, is there?" asked Teddards reflectively. "I don't reckon now thet Jackson 'ull try ter play ther fool an' cut up rusty an' shoot."

"He's by hisse'f all right," returned Jason, "an' we 'ull give 'im no chanst ter make trouble. Fact is, he won't think of hit ontell hit's too late. Login 'ud prob'ly s'picion us, but Jackson he air easy! Ride back, Wes'—we is jest about thar—an' watch them fellers which is drunk. Hit 'ud be jest like 'em ter straggle off an' 'larm ther town."

As Teddards obeyed the command they mounted the last hill-crest and streamed on over it. After this a valley intervened, beyond which lay Bellville and the old stone jail. Roused by the trampling of the horses a frightened Negro looked out cautiously from the door of a roadside cabin, while from its unfenced yard a watchful cur voiced a shrill alarm. Then the moon, new-risen and half obscured in the east, shot its thin beams through a rift in the clouds and flooded the still earth with a tenuous and beautiful light. And the dark line of relentless men bent downward into the valley.

Two miles away and on the other road, with her horse still pressed to its utmost speed, the girl raised her head and looked. In daylight she might have seen the mob, for the land lay open between, but by night the distance was too great and she could not distinguish them. But the voice of the dog carried far and came to her across the fields like a note of most urgent warning, for she knew what that barking meant.

Was she too late? Her brain reeled at the thought and a dry sob rose in her throat. How long this endless road! It might be that Billy was dead now while she was still here in the highway. She raised her hand and shouted to the horse, but the good beast was almost spent. Suddenly he stopped—for a moment he tottered and seemed about to fall—then gathering his energies for one final failing effort he shot himself forward and broke the next rise like the thoroughbred that he was.



CHAPTER XXIV

THE MOB

JACKSON, whom Login had installed as jailer, was a heavy and stolid man—a man, moreover, who was slow of speech and who was inclined to an easy deliberation in all of his actions—yet men were accustomed to say that the man was by no means so slow or so dull as his appearance seemed to indicate. And although he had been for a long time a resident of the court-house town, he was originally a man of the Keowee country—a man, too, who had known Billy Mayson's father and grandfather, and even Billy himself in those days when the lawyer had been only a little lad.

Since Billy's advent into Bellville the necessity of consulting with such of his clients as languished in durance vile had taken the young man quite often to the jail and in this way an old intimacy had been renewed. Still the ties which bind man to man are seldom very strong under circumstances as common as this, and had it not been for his vague memory of the yellow-haired lad who used sometimes to come laughing through the oak-woods that shadow the Keowee hills—had he not remembered that the father of that little lad had in other days been his own stanch friend and true, the jailer would scarcely have been so deeply moved at the news of Billy Mayson's arrest. As it was, however, Jackson took Billy's misfortune almost as a personal

grievance, and gave Sarah Ann, his wife, the benefit of his opinion in the matter.

"It ain't no ways possible that Billy has done sech a thing," he said to her decidedly, "but folks is down on him and they are jest tryin' to harm him for 'spite!"

Sarah Ann Jackson bore no resemblance to her husband. She was thin and sinewy, and her temper, like the spring weather, was gusty, fitful and quite uncertain. Still, underneath the ever-ruffled surface of her nature there were quiet depths of kindness and of that rare and valuable quality which is misnamed "common sense." She had not known Billy as long as Jackson had, but with a woman's quick intuition she had come in a shorter time to know him very much better. Once a child had been hers—not for long; only for the space of a little flickering life—and this tall and straight young lawyer had found the way to the heart of the little one, had brought it sweetmeats and toys, and had added to its happiness. She seldom spoke of that child now that it was gone, but she had been its mother and she had not forgotten it.

So when Login's telegram came, asking that Billy should share their quarters and not be forced to endure the dirt and discomforts of the common cells, Jackson had answered promptly, and Sarah Ann had set her "company room" in order as if for a bidden guest.

"At least he shall be comfortable," she said.

The jail at Bellville is a two-story structure of stone and stands on a back street very near the edge of the town. Viewed from this street, it presents only the unprepossessing aspect of a steep roof, of four gray walls pierced above and below by



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narrow, iron-barred windows, and of a massive reënforced door set in the centre of the front, for the doors at the rear are concealed by the high plank fence of the jail yard. Within, there is a staircase beyond which admission is gained by a second door to the long hall which traverses the lower story. On each side of this hall are the rooms in use by the jailer's family; above these are the cells. It was one of the rooms opening into the lower hall which Sarah Ann had prepared for the lawyer.

Hence upon Billy's arrival, instead of being sent to consort with the criminals on the upper floor, he was ushered into Sarah Ann's guest-chamber, a clean and airy apartment which really was superior in its location and its furnishings to his own room at the old hotel. And Jackson, conducting him thither, caught his hand in a sort of dumb sympathy and pressed it, and Mrs. Jackson bustled about and wiped her eyes furtively on her apron and went away to "see about supper."

Then, even before the prisoner and Login had time to seat themselves, Kyle and a half-dozen of his fellow lawyers called upon Billy to tender their sympathies and to offer whatever of service they might be able to render in his behalf, and under such considerate kindness Billy's mood became almost cheerful and his waning faith that other and more accurate evidence would be forthcoming on the morrow grew strong again, and he laughed at Login's somber face, for it seemed to him that this farce must very soon play itself out.

But after supper had been served and he had eaten and the lawyers and Login were gone, a revulsion of feeling seized upon him, for as the last faint light of the autumn day came creeping in at the iron-barred

window it seemed to him that his fellow men had done him injustice—that so far as he had been able he had followed the plain path of his duty and that this libellous and threatening charge had been his sole reward. What if a revelation of this mystery never came? Such a possibility was no far-fetched hypothesis. What would happen then? Time and again men had been sent to their deaths on evidence purely circumstantial. In every case of hidden murder some one was charged with the crime—some man was arrested of whom no person could say really whether he were guilty or not. Always, of course, there was a trial, but the result of that trial was largely determined by the existing public prejudices, by the skill of the lawyers, and by the personal bias of juries, sympathetic or otherwise. Billy being a lawyer himself knew his profession too well to repose much confidence in judicial infallibility. The courts seek to deal righteously, but too often they must seek blindly and in difficult places. Your hoodwinked goddess with sword and balance gets hold of the wrong man occasionally.

Alone with his gloomy reflections, with only a square of the night framed in forbidding iron to bear him company, the chill and creeping fear which the young man had fought back all day came upon him and unnerved him. Thoughts of his grandfather arose in his mind, and of his mother who had died in his childhood, and of Annie. What were his friends saying privately one to another—Login and Kyle and the rest of them—and what were his enemies saying? Although the night was not very warm, great drops of sweat gathered on his forehead and rolled down and fell on the floor, and he

arose and paced restlessly the narrow limits of his imprisoning room.

Then the night, as if in sympathy with his fears, began to grow darker and black clouds arose, and in the south the quick lightning lit the face of the sky with uneasy quiverings. And the town clock with measured strokes announced the passing hour, and the wind rose and went moaning and rattling about the corners of the building and down through the empty streets. And the young man, listening, at last grew afraid of his fear. Could it be that he was going to play the coward—that he would at this supreme moment be willing to cringe and whimper and fawn in the hope that his fellow men might spare him his life? In his need his self-contempt arose and steadied him.

In the end he mastered himself, his step grew slower, and finally, after filling his pipe, he sank into a chair. If he was able to save himself he would do so calmly, he thought, and if he must die he would die as a Mayson should—die with his face to his God, a gentleman unafraid.

Later he rose to retire, but as he did so he noticed that the moon, struggling through the broken clouds, had filled all the room with its light, and that traced in shadows on the floor was the pattern of the window-bars. Earlier he would have welcomed the sight, but now he was tired and he wished to sleep undisturbed. Crossing the room, he drew his curtains close, but as he retraced his steps he heard a trampling as of many hoofs and a voice calling for Jackson.

"Who's there?" Jackson, occupying the next room but one, stirred in his bed and answered sleepily.

"Git up, Jackson; git up! We is got a man out here fer you."

Billy heard the tramp of the jailer's heavy feet, the unbarring of a door, and then the sounds in quick succession of a scuffle, a blow, and a heavy fall. In the next moment Mrs. Jackson, terrified but determined, was hammering at his door.

"It is the Simpkins crowd!" she cried, as he opened to her knocking. "They are after *you*!" With a quick movement she slipped something from under her gown, handed it to him, and ran on through the hall.

Out in front, the crowd, half drunken and maddened, had broken away entirely from their leader's control. A portion of the men bound Jackson by means of a bridle-rein to the projecting bars of a window, the remainder burst in with a crash the double-locked inner doors.

As Billy heard the rush of their feet in the hallway he swung his own door wide open and shoved his lighted lamp well out beyond the threshold, lighting up the hall and the threatening front of the crowd. A volley of oaths greeted his sudden appearance and a half-dozen bullets ripped viciously through the woodwork of the door. Far in the rear, with oaths and shoutings, Jason was fighting to regain control, but the mob heeded him as little as they heeded the blustering wind.

But as the foremost man thrust himself within the circle cast by the light, Billy's voice, short, sharp, and insistent, stayed him suddenly. His words were not loud, but they were firm, and his tones were vibrant with a deadly intensity.

"I have six shots here," he said, "and I do not often miss my aim. Just as the first of you steps

through that doorway I will kill him! The second shall follow him! Probably you can have your way afterward—you hundred men who have come to kill one—but two of you I will surely send straight into the darkness before me! I have told you! Now let the man who is willing to die come forward and pass the lamp!"

The crowd had halted and was wavering. Even as he was speaking they had heard the pistol-lock click ominously under his hand. He was in the darkness and they were in the light—the advantage was with him. Had one led the way all would have followed, but no man cared to die. A babel of striving voices filled the hallway and the mob stood irresolute.

"Let me git up thar!" cried Jason angrily, as he struggled through the press of the crowd.

Billy, hearing the voice, raised his pistol afresh, for he thought that he understood. As his father had died, so, too, he would die.

"I am ready!" he called in a voice that was strangely soft.

The roar of voices grew louder. The mob, thrown back upon itself, gathered as if for a spring. Then away back in the heart of the town a great bell clanged in violent and sudden alarm.

"Fire?" queried a yokel with big, excited eyes.

"Naw, yer fool! Ther Sheriff!" gasped Teddards, fighting his way toward the door.

Jackson, tied to the window-grating, caught for once in his life the psychological moment.

"The Sheriff!" he yelled; "the Sheriff! The Sheriff an' a hundred men! Run fer yer hosses! Run! Run! Run!"

As if to emphasise his words, the jangle of the bell

grew wilder and from the darkness of the courthouse square came the shouts of men calling to each other and running; but the lynchers, infected with unreasoning panic, had broken already and were in headlong flight to their horses. Reaching these, they did not halt, but devoid of order and organisation they swept away, every man for himself, to the safety of the country roads.

Billy stood with tense muscles for one brief moment, listened to the hurried retreat, and recovered his lamp from the hall. Then swiftly a reaction came and he sat down white and shaking, letting the pistol fall from his hands.

Jackson laughed grimly as his wife loosed his bonds. "It was a long shot," he remarked, "but it won!" Then suddenly a plan fully formed sprang into being in his brain and he ran to Billy's door.

"Whisky!" he called to his wife. "Bring me the whisky bottle, quick!"

Already he could hear Login and the few men who had come to his aid hurrying up the street in front. He thrust the door hastily open, and as his wife handed him the liquor which he had demanded he gripped her commandingly by the arm.

"Tell 'em nothin'—Login an' the rest of 'em. Tell 'em you don't know—that the crowd has gone an' that I follered!" He leaned over her heavily, whispering into her ear, and as she listened her eyes brightened suddenly.

Nodding her perfect comprehension and all aflame with excitement, she pushed him away from her. "Go on! Be quick!" she exclaimed, then she ran back to the front to meet the on-coming men.

Jackson stepped inside the room and spoke to Billy. "Come with me!" he said in an undertone.



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Billy was dazed and exhausted and he obeyed mechanically, but Jackson caught him by the arm and almost dragged him forth.

"For Heaven's sake hurry!" whispered the jailer urgently; "make the very best time out of here that you can!"

In a moment they had traversed the hall, had opened the door at the rear, and were crossing the prison yard. As they neared the fence Jackson produced the bottle.

"Take a swaller," he said; "it'll steady you, an' we've got to climb!"

The potent spirit sent the blood back into Billy's face and the two scrambled over the obstruction, crossed a vacant lot and came to a dark and little-used street at the other side. When they had reached this Billy stopped.

"What——" he began, but Jackson seized him again.

"Don't talk!" said the jailer concisely; "walk!" and setting the example himself, he led hurriedly away through the darkness.

In the meantime, Login, shotgun in hand and accompanied by a half-dozen men, had reached the front door of the jail. After being aroused by Annie Chambliss he had come as quickly as he could, but the silence at the prison and the sounds of mad riding in the distance had already told him that his coming was too late.

Sarah Ann, holding her apron to her eyes, met them at the steps.

"Jackson?" she asked in troubled tones, "have you seen Jackson? A mob has been here. They were after Mr. Mayson. Oh, Mr. Sheriff, they have gone and Jackson has followed them!"

"But Mayson——" cried Login in
"What about poor Billy?"

"Gone!" groaned the woman; "gone!"

There was a clatter of hoofs in the street.
men were coming, bringing horses, for the
heard the mob riding off. Login turned ar
toward them.

"Come on, men!" he called. "It is not to
We'll overtake the scoundrels yet!"

But although he scoured with diligence all
roads which lead from Bellville to Keowee, he
took no one, and at nine o'clock next morning
was returning disconsolately homeward, he
upon Jackson sitting beside the road.

"News?" he asked at once.

The jailer shook his head gloomily. "a
ain't none!" he answered. "I have done w
could. They fooled me at fust an' they tie
After Sarah Ann had loosened me I follered
But I was afoot," he added apologetically.

Login leaned over his horse's shoulder. "Jack
he asked with vengeful eagerness, "could
make any of 'em out?"

The jailer nodded. "Simpkins's gang," h
swered tersely.

Login rose in his stirrups and swung his
sharply around.

"I'll just go after him!" he cried. "By hea
If he but chirps I'll shoot him!"

Jackson sprang up in alarm. "Careful, She
he ejaculated warningly. "Arrest Simpkins i
want to, but don't you hurt him none. I—
After this thing is over I've got to talk to yo

The Sheriff rode away puzzling over the ea
ness in the words.



CHAPTER XXV

BILLY MAYSON'S FLIGHT

As soon as they had left the town behind, Billy's conductor had abandoned the open road for the more unfrequented ways of the woods and the fields; and, although the young man was tired and rebelled inwardly against this toiling on foot through the night, he knew too well the straits to which sheriffs and jailers are sometimes put in their efforts to save their prisoners from lynching to make any audible objection. It seemed certain to him that Jackson, fearing the return of the mob, was taking him away to avoid the lawless crew, and underneath his keen sense of physical discomfort Billy found a certain satisfaction in the thought that on Jackson alone lay the responsibility for this flight—that his own part was merely one of passive obedience.

But when Bellville had been left some miles behind, Jackson felt that the immediate danger of discovery was past, and he robbed Billy of his last grain of comfort by the revelation of a motive for this journey as startling as it had been unsuspected.

"I reckon you see how it is now," he remarked with decision. "You don't stand no sort of a chance either in court nor out of it. I'm with you, though, Billy, an' so's Sarah Ann. You just cut loose from me now an' git away from this country—leastways, for a while!"

Billy stopped and faced about, for the jailer was behind him. "What?" he ejaculated. "Do you mean——"

"I mean just what I say," returned Jackson evenly. "You've got to run or in one way or another they'll finish ye! I've putty well seen that from the start. Like as not this same crowd'll come again, but even if they don't you'll stan' no chance in a trial. There's times when the best must run; your time has come right now!"

"But you? How can you release a prisoner?"

"The matter stands this way: Jason an' his friends are goin' to be afraid to talk—even if they do talk nobody's goin' to believe 'em when they claim to be innocent. You will be missin' an' the whole country will think that the mob got you. Nobody'll know how 'twas exceptin' me an' Sarah Ann, an' we'll keep our mouths shut, sure. I thought of it all just in time, but I couldn't talk then. Now's your time, Billy; it's now or never with you!" A ring of passionate eagerness had crept into his tones and he leaned forward, trying to read through the darkness the hidden expression of Billy's face.

And Billy stood irresolute. His first impulse was to go back at once to the jail—to refuse utterly to creep away like a coward. Then temptation came upon him, colouring his thoughts subtly and inviting him. Was there any true bravery in throwing his life away? What, indeed, if another mob should come—a more determined mob than this last had been? Suppose he should be convicted on this charge, which was so grossly false? All his fears arose again and passed in array before him. Then, too, he was young, the red blood was leaping in his

veins, and life and freedom seemed good to him. What would it matter if he gave up this fighting against odds—if he abandoned this people who were seeking his life and went away to some other place and began his life all anew?

"They'll think you are dead," the jailer went on. "They'll never think to look for you. All that you have to do is to stay away. Start to-night, Billy! Keep goin' all night—to-morrow you'll be far enough away to take the train. If you need a start, write to me—I'm pretty poor, but I'll manage it somehow."

Suddenly Billy reached his decision. "Jackson," he said, "I'll go! Why have you done so much for me?"

Then seeing that the young man was moved, Jackson answered gruffly.

"You're wastin' time! Go on!" he said.

For a moment they stood, each clasping the other's hand, and then they parted in silence, Jackson flushed with the success of his scheme, Billy ill at ease and unsatisfied, yet unwilling to place himself in undeserved jeopardy again.

When the last faint sound of the jailer's retreating footsteps had died away and the younger man found himself alone in the wide gray stillness of the open fields, he almost instinctively turned his face back in the direction of the road. All in a moment a great space had been placed between himself and his fellow men, and realising this his heart had grown sick with loneliness and he longed for the touch of a hand. He crossed the field stumblingly, the long, dead grasses tangling themselves about his feet, and in a little while he came to the gullied trace of an old and abandoned highway—a long-disused

route from Keowee to Bellville. By following this he knew he would strike into the public thoroughfare some two miles farther on, for to his left was the wild old Blackberry place, while in his front and just in line with the clouded south loomed the narrow plateau whereon the railroad lies. Scarcely, however, had he descended the hill and crossed the worn "foot-log" which here spans the waters of Brightman's, before he heard ahead of him the muffled sound of a footfall on the overgrown, grass-cumbered path.

By all odds he should have turned aside and hidden himself, but as yet his heart was not in this flight. It seemed to him that a blind chance had brought him here, and now he was willing that chance should decide again. As a matter of fact, the great strain under which he had laboured was telling on him; he was tired—beat! He did not care what the end might be! He stopped just in the middle of the path and folded his arms and waited.

Out of the darkness ahead a dim shape resolved itself into the form of a hurrying woman. Seeing him, she stopped, threw her hands up with a gesture of surprise, and then advanced again menacingly.

"Out'n de way!" she called. "Out'n de way fer ter let Witch Nancy pass! White man er black man, out'n de way!"

Billy started violently. "Mammy!" he answered.

The woman held out her tremulous hands. To her mind he was dead—the mob had murdered him, and this was his spirit which had come walking through the long, dark ways to meet her. She had done her feeble best—she had sent Annie Chambliss hurrying on, and then, unable to remain behind, she



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had followed as best she might. Ah, the spirits knew how hard she had tried, and her boy no doubt understood it now. Hence even in death he had come to speak to her—else why was he here?

"Sonny!" she had stopped and she stepped back a space. She called to him softly, lest his wraith should dissolve and vanish.

Billy, indeed, understood. He knew old Nancy's love, and he thought that she had heard some rumour of the mob and that she was coming to him.

"I have escaped!" he said. "I am free of the mob and the jail. They say—— Do you know what they say?"

The old woman gave a little cry. Surely he must be in the flesh! She came forward timorously and touched him.

"You ain't hurt!" she panted. "You ain't—dead!"

"No," he replied; "I am here. The people wish to hang me. If the mob fails there is still the law. I had thought to run away."

She clung to him, fondling his hand as he told her in a few rapid words of the real situation of affairs, but when he had ended her old strong self came uppermost again and she stood before him mysterious and commanding like a priestess of the night and of the woods.

"Come wi' me," she said tersely. "Who knows dese woods an' dese swamps any better'n ole Nancy does? You'se plum wore out an' tiahed now. Des lemme kyar yer whar yer kin res'. Mos' folks is feer'd o' me. Nobody gwine bodder ole Nancy's house. Come 'long wi' me!"

She turned in the path and led the way and he followed her. It seemed to him that his will was

gone—that he was drifting, and that any whom he met might lead him.

With his brain thus almost benumbed he was scarcely conscious of the weary miles which ensued until he roused himself from his stupor at the door of Nancy's cabin. Just at the back of the house a new cotton-shed had been erected, and in spite of the witch-woman's protest he crept in there, stretched himself on the freshly gathered cotton, and in a moment fell fast asleep.

But although Billy was weary, old Nancy's muscles seemed fashioned of iron and she did not stop to rest. Hurriedly she looked about for Amos, but Amos, weary of the loneliness, had long since gone on to the houses of the Chambliss "quarter." Failing to find the old man, she took a basket and went herself to the big black-walnut tree which stood at the edge of the clearing. Filling her basket with the husks of the fallen nuts, she hastened back to the house. Then raking amid the ashes, she gathered the live coals together and laying on wood she fanned them into a blaze. Afterward she hung a pot above the fire and put in water and the walnut husks. Then she bound her "head-han'kercher" tighter and swayed to and fro and chanted a sort of incantation over the flickering light. And when the pot began to boil she went to her "chist" and took out her little hoard—the savings of a lifetime—and laid the money conveniently on a shelf.

But as heavily as his weariness had borne upon him, Billy did not sleep long, and just at the breaking of the dawn he entered the cabin door. With rest, clarity had come to his thoughts, together with a settled determination. That Annie had ridden



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to save him he had learned from Mammy Nancy's story, and now even in the midst of his trouble a great gladness had come: to him it seemed no little thing that Annie had dared for his sake. He was content that others should think of him as dead—he was dead, he thought, so far as his former life was concerned—but Annie should know that her effort had not been made in vain, and when he was gone she should be his executor. A few lines to her, a cheque and a bill of sale both dated before his arrest, would arrange the matter fast enough. To-day he would lie hid and would set his affairs in order here in sight of the Mayson place, and to-night would turn his back on the Keowee country and would journey north or west.

"You'll have to hide me to-day, mammy," he said as he stepped into the cabin, "and there are some things that I want you to do. It is nearing sunrise now and I'd better find a quiet place."

The old woman fixed her eyes on his haggard face and observed him as concernedly as a she-fox watches its menaced young.

"I done thought 'bout dat," she replied. "You stay een de house. Nobody comin' ter my house 'cept ole Amos, mebbe, an' I kin manage him. You jes' stay inside ter-day an' ter-night you kin start. I gwine fix yer, I is. You see dat pot? Dar's wa'nut juice een hit—jes' de same ole wa'nut juice what yer gits on yer han's when yer goes ter hull out de wa'nuts."

Billy stared at her for a moment and then suddenly he caught the idea. She wished to dye his skin yellow or brown—to make a mulatto of him. Truly the old woman was shrewd, and this disguise of her fashioning would enable him to pass unrecog-

nised even though he should choose to walk through the Keowee streets. He had only to have the hair clipped close to his scalp—many Negroes wore it so—and to hide the blue of his eyes by a down-drawn hat-brim, or better still behind a pair of smoked glasses.

With his mind thus set at ease he busied himself with the disposal of his meager effects—with sending to Annie the money which he had promised for Mrs. Binns and with forwarding a request to her that she might take all other of his interests in charge. She could do all this, he knew. There would be no objection raised and but few questions would be asked. The Chamblisses were too well known to be suspected of engaging in doubtful transactions.

For his own immediate use, however, he was but ill supplied with the least common denominator of values—with that ready money lacking which he would have so many hardships to endure. He had, it is true, a considerable balance at the bank, but he could not think of any means of securing this, and the few dollars which he had in his pockets would soon be exhausted when he found himself in a strange land. But the witch-woman had foreseen his predicament, and she came again to the rescue by taking down her own money from the shelf and placing it in his hands. The young man could never have taken this absolutely—not even had his life depended upon it—but he saw clearly that Annie could repay the old woman from his own deposit in the Bellville Bank.

After his writing was done—a very brief note to Annie it was, together with the cheques—he began the task of arranging his disguise. Somewhere



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about the place the witch-woman had found some old blue overalls, and after he had applied the dye he discarded his coat and drew on the ragged addition to his wardrobe over his remaining garments. The spectacles were wanting, but he hoped that before the morning had come he would be able to purchase a pair.

Afterward, although the day seemed a long and weary one, he confined himself strictly to the cabin, while old Nancy provided him food and came and went about the plantation. Late in the afternoon she brought him news that Annie had returned from Bellville, worn out and sick, and that everywhere men were searching for Jason Simpkins and for his own dead body.

At last, when the level rays of the setting sun crept in through the crack of the cabin, he arose and took his old nurse's hands in both his own.

"I am going now, mammy," he said. "Going out yonder to the west. And I may stay a long time, mammy, but some day, please God, the truth will come out and I will come home again!"

But although his words were brave with hope, his voice shook and the unaccustomed tears in his eyes blurred the long red stretch of the distant road, the fields and the rolling hills and the hazy purple lines of the woodlands. It was his country, this landscape that he was looking upon; in cabin or in "big 'ouse" the people were his people; here in the good red hills his mother had brought him into being and here he had hoped to die. Away off on the far brown slopes the soft lights lay tenderly, and down in the trees by the swamp the ruby-throated doves were calling. And the dusky evening had come and he was going away!

When he had reached the border of the stream he turned and looked back. Somewhere beyond the nearer ridge the Chambliss house and the orchard lay and "Miss Ma'y" was there, and Annie; and they were sitting on the long, low porch and Julie Ann was singing in the kitchen—and—and—it might be that they were thinking of him.

Clenching his fists, he hurried away, crossing the creek and the fields and coming to a path in the shadowy edge of the forest. A little farther on he met Amos and Wilson's John coming home from the burying of Archer. The two eyed him curiously, but they passed him by unrecognised.

"Who dat?" queried the younger man, jingling his wage for the grave-digging uneasily in his pockets.

"Dunno," grunted Amos in answer. "I doan' so'shate much wid yaller niggers."

And Wilson's John, being yellow himself, laughed scornfully, but thereafter he held his peace.

And the night came on apace, and men, riding the long roads and searching, called to each other through the darkness, and Mammy Nancy went very stealthily on her mission to the Chamblisses.



CHAPTER XXVI

BEN JIM'S DISCOVERY

SWEPT away by the rush of the crowd and well knowing that the opportune moment had been clumsily lost, Jason Simpkins, as he fled along the Keowee road, had punctuated the air with volleys of explosive profanity. Not only had his carefully laid plans failed totally, but his riotous and drunken followers had also disregarded all his precautions and had exposed themselves recklessly to Jackson's watchful eyes. Jackson, of course, would give information to Login, and with so much knowledge in his possession the Sheriff could scarcely fail to trace the plot to its origin. Jason had never shared the notions of his ignorant associates. It had been plain to him from the beginning that to whip Negroes was one thing and to hang or to attempt to hang a white man was quite another, but in this matter his hate had mastered him and he had been willing to risk all consequences. To further his own ends he had led his followers to hope for an undetected escape, or, failing that, to suppose that they would be allowed by a public sentiment wholly in sympathy with them to slip easily through the meshes of the law, but Jason had known his people too well to believe such things himself. He felt that if he should be taken he could hope for no mercy at the hands of Billy Mayson's friends, and although Shaw and Griggs might still be willing to aid him the late

reaction in his favour was all too recent a thing to be trusted absolutely.

And so riding homeward he had with many words vented his hot displeasure upon the poor dupes whom he had enticed into trouble, and these, now cowed and ashamed, and fearful, withal, lest the Sheriff should come up with them, had slipped away one by one and had left Jason to his own devices. Hence when he came at last to his dwelling Simpkins was entirely alone, and knowing that his safety lay solely in a speedy flight, he had tarried only long enough to pack up a few of his most cherished belongings and then, shouldering his decrepit musket and abandoning his worn-out horse, he had taken the road again.

And had this flight been the price paid for revenge upon Billy Mayson the "poor white" would have been content. It was only because he had failed—because he had incurred the penalty of crime and yet had in no way satisfied his ancient grudge—that he bemoaned his fate and cursed the fortune which thus had used him hardly. Still he did not tarry on that account.

Thus it happened that when Tom Login on the morning after Billy's disappearance came swearing vengeance to the cross-roads above the Jester place he found there only the deserted house on which to vent his grief-burdened anger. Afterward he rode through all of Jason's fields, and beat warily through the underbrush and along the weedy sides of the ditches, only to come again in the end empty-handed into the road.

But although the quest seemed hopeless, the grim Sheriff did not abate his efforts; and the men of the community, shocked into a tardy sympathy for that



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Billy Mayson whom formerly they had known so well, came to him almost in a body to join their labour to his. Then for two days and nights they rode seeking for Jason and for Billy Mayson dead or alive, but they found nothing, and this was fortunate for Jason since it might have fared ill with him had he met the Sheriff suddenly. But later, after the search had grown old and the people, tired out, had begun to return to their homes, Jackson spoke to Login privately and Login turned aside from his task and went back to Bellville satisfied.

So, little by little, the excitement which had rent the neighbourhood quieted. Archer had been killed and was buried; there had been a man named Mayson: a mob had come and he had vanished. For six days there had been much talk on the street-corners and at the forks of the roads and the newspapers had carried black headlines, but at the end of that time the matter was dropped. The cotton-picking season had come, there was merchandise to be bought and sold, and corn had to be harvested. In truth, the world was too busy to give precious time to vain and unfruitful surmisings.

The eighth day after Billy's departure opened bright and fair on the Chambliss place. For a day and a night after his arrest there had been alarm and bitter grief for Annie and for her mother, but in the end old Nancy had come stealing like a thief through the night to bring them the news which relieved and gladdened them.

But the two were gentlewomen; there could be no unseemly rejoicing, and also they had a secret to guard. Hence on the morning in question the business of the farm was going forward steadily—the "pickers" were filing out to the cotton fields and

the great lumbering four-horse wagon was just setting off for the "bottoms" in order to bring in the ripened corn. Down at a house in the "quarter" Julie Ann in motherly earnestness was reasoning with Ben Jim, her son.

Ben Jim was an obliging lad, but there were subjects on which he held adverse opinions, and one of these subjects was schools. He thought that the tumble-down coloured schoolhouse which stood "over 'cross de creek" and by the side of the Bellville road was a weariness of the flesh, and he feared that, like Paul, "much learning" might make him "mad." Julie Ann thought differently, and according to their several gifts each was arguing the matter. To sustain his views Ben Jim used his facile tongue, his mother the flat side of the first shingle that met her hand.

The amount of logic resident in a well-handled shingle proved surprising to the lad, so much so that when once the argument had waxed warm he started hastily for the school. His voice, however, was choked with lamentations, and the burden of his sorrow was so great that he gave but half an eye to his dog, a lean and yellow cur which came creeping apologetically around the corner of the cabin. Still he could not wholly ignore his four-footed dependent, which cringed abjectly and writhed and made supplication by means of its stumpy tail, so as he passed out of the yard he looked back and crooked his finger, and the dog, beholding the sign, leaped about joyfully and followed him.

Together they went down the road, the boy plodding stolidly along between the deep-worn wagon-ruts, the animal bounding from side to side and nosing eagerly in the briers and the bush-



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covered fence-rows. It was still early, a light frost had given its hoariness to the wayside grass, and the air was keen and bracing. Under the cheering influence of the morning and the bright rays of the up-coming sun Ben Jim's spirits revived, so that he whistled to the dog, and presently he stopped to cast stones at the noisy, blue "jay-birds" that mocked him with their raucous cries as they teetered on the drooping boughs of the low, red-fruited haw-bushes. The jays are dissolute birds and on Fridays they most surely carry sand to the devil, so Ben Jim was at feud with the race.

Seeing its master thus worthily occupied, the dog crossed the fence, explored a ditch-bank and made a hasty circuit about the strip of fallow land that lay along the brow of the hill. Then it came back to the hedge and worked in and out industriously. Suddenly it gave an excited yelp and leaped high above the tall, yellow broom-sedge, craning its neck in the meantime and peering.

Ben Jim pricked up his ears. "Dat's a rabbit!" he exclaimed, fairly falling through the hedge in his haste to reach the other side.

The rabbit, seeing no reason for lingering, dodged through a crack in the fence and went scurrying, his white tail marking the way down the hill toward the creek. Then Ben Jim gave a whoop and, pell-mell, yelling and yelping, the boy and the dog followed in hot pursuit. In a little while the boy lost his hat and the dog distanced the boy, and the rabbit being pressed took to the hedge again. Thence it doubled back into a clump of weeds and led its pursuer a headlong chase around the gullied front of the elevated slope, while Ben Jim, having recovered his headgear, stood in the road and whooped him-

self hoarse with glee. The dog was gaining now; the rabbit had its ears laid back and was running for its very life. Surely this was living! The boy climbed up on the fence ready to be in at the death.

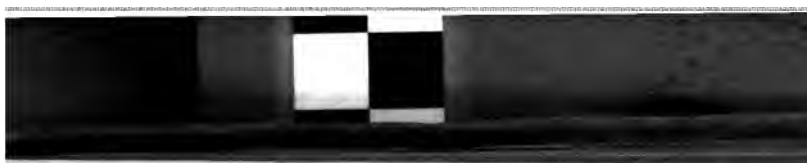
But the rabbit did not want to die, so it doubled again suddenly, and the dog overran it and it shot away toward the refuge of the swamp.

In the overgrown mazes of the bottom the chase went slower, and Ben Jim left the road and followed in order to give the dog encouragement should the rabbit prove old and shrewd. But the cur himself was a veteran well versed in rabbit-hunting lore and he was not to be eluded. After a half-hour of "tracking," his short, quick yelps were changed to a fuller and more deliberate note, and Ben Jim far in the rear knew that the quarry had been "treed."

"Under de bridge! Dat rabbit under dat ole bridge down dar!" he exclaimed emphatically, as he thrust the intervening briars aside and went hurrying toward the faintly marked wagon-track. "Whoop! Whoopee! Talk ter 'im, Ranger!"

Reaching the creek-side, he heard the dog underneath the bridge indeed, barking violently and scratching. Running to the other side lest the quarry come out and escape, the Negro pushed through the tangled weeds and stooped to look under. Then his eyes bulged almost out of their sockets and his black face turned ashen gray.

"Oh, Lordy! Lordy!" he screamed, throwing his books away and leaping at one bound to the top of the shelving bank. "Oh, Lordy! Lordy!" he panted, as he sped up the hill and tumbled over the fence into the road, and—"Lordy! Lordy!" he faintly breathed, as he fell exhausted in the doorway of Julie Ann's cabin.



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"Wha—what's de matter wid yer, nigger?" demanded his mother, wavering between severity and excitement.

"A man! A white man! He daid!" gasped the breathless and horrified urchin.

The woman grasped him by the shoulder and almost dragged him to his feet. "Whar?" she asked hastily. "Whar?"

"'Way down de bottom. 'Way down pas' de spring branch, onderneaf dat ar bridge!"

Julie Ann stood trembling. She had heard of the search for Billy Mayson and she had no doubt that Ben Jim had stumbled upon his body. Her first impulse was to run straight to the "big house" and break the news at once to the "white folks" there, but in a moment her second thought suggested a better plan. Already excitement had sapped the strength of her mistress and Annie's face had in these last few weeks become white and drawn as she had never seen it before. Surely it was useless to shock either of them suddenly with this additional horror.

Almost roughly she caught Ben Jim by the arm. "Come, go 'long wi' me!" she commanded.

Then threading the winding paths that led across the fields, she came with hurrying feet to the front of old Nancy's cabin. Was not the witch-woman Billy Mayson's mammy? Who, then, before this old nurse who had nurtured him, had the right to look first into the cold, dead face of the man?

As she reached the door the old woman met her, scanning her suspiciously. "Whut yer come fer, Julie Ann?" The voice was hard and cold, for the speaker did not encourage the intimacy of her people.

But Julie Ann was too greatly excited to heed the displeasure of the other. "Ben Jim he wuz a-gwine ter school an' he went thoo de bottom an' he foun' er man—er daid man! I—I—I thought hit mout be *him!*"

For one brief second Witch Nancy's face went gray and she caught at the rude door-facing in an effort to support herself, but she recovered quickly, and standing straight spoke in a voice which carried conviction in its tones:

"No," she said, "hit air some other man. Le's us go look."

So the three, Nancy leading the way, skirted the hill and passed through the woodland until they came to the narrow track down which, reeling and stumbling, the gray man once had gone. On the edge of the "bottoms" the morning-glory vines were wreathed about the stalks of the corn, and the bell-shaped blossoms—blossoms of white and blue and purple and red—still lingered in the sheltered spots where the frost had not yet come. Farther on, and just above a spot where the lush marsh-grass had changed its green coat for one of sober brown, a big gray hawk sat upright on the dead limb of a pine watching the black-coated crows which were circling high and scolding. And the sun rising higher had turned the frost into clear-hearted drops of dew, and the young willows shadowing the drains reached out their pliant branches and seemed almost to caress the Negroes as they went down to the creek-side where the water on its way to the sea stopped for a moment to whisper a message into the ears of the unanswering dead.

When they had reached the place, old Nancy

parted the half-dead wilted growth—the weeds and the frost-bitten “cuckle-burrs”—then stepped forward, stooped and drew back with a quavering sigh in which there was mingled strangely her pity and her relief. Over her shoulder Julie Ann was staring with round and wondering eyes.

“Hit’s er ole man! See dar, his hair done gray!” ejaculated the younger woman in the midst of her surprise.

“Sho’ ’nuff!” answered Nancy soothingly. “An’ he crep’ off yere ter die! Do you-alls go an’ call some er de yuther folks an’ I’ll stay by ’im an’ watch. Not ’at watchin’ is a-gwine ter he’p ’im any,” she muttered as they passed out of sight.

But Ben Jim did not go to school that day, for when the alarm had been given and his mistress had come to know of the body which lay by the bridge she sent him bearing telegrams hurriedly into Keowee, and later, when a crowd had gathered and the Sheriff had come and the Coroner, he was the lion of the hour. For each man questioned Ben Jim, and to each man Ben Jim told a different story, adding to its details and its colouring or subtracting therefrom according to his estimate of the listener’s worthiness.



CHAPTER XXVII

THE SHERIFF UNRAVELS A MYSTERY AND LUKE SURRENDERS HIMSELF

WITH the finding of the body beneath the bridge a great excitement had again arisen in the Keowee neighbourhood. Mere proximity if nothing more was sufficient to connect the occurrence with that other tragedy which had so lately preceded it, hence there were not wanting men who, remembering the money-lender's mysterious advent into the community, now wagged their heads knowingly and claimed that out of that shadowy past a vengeance had come tardily but surely. Then it was noised abroad that Login had recognised the body as that of the old schoolmaster who had taught at Lower Rehoboth, and messengers were despatched forthwith to bring to the spot those who could speak with certainty.

So the dead man's identity was proved; moreover, the man was hurt with knife-wounds, and there was found in the pocket of his coat a memorandum book in which the location of the Mayson place was noted and roughly sketched—also there was the name, "Archer." Clearly there was a connection between the money-lender and the schoolmaster other than that of death, and the circumstances seemed to say plainly that it was not in Billy Mayson at all that the probable guilt of the murder lay. Moved by a well-hidden remorse, the hot-headed, unthinking farmers spoke harshly against those men who had

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composed the mob, and the "poor whites," sullen and resentful and afraid, yet demoralised by their leader's sudden flight, held themselves aloof, waiting in sullen silence the outcome of the strange affair.

But after three days a rumour arose which, gathering volume as it spread, tended to allay the popular resentment against these suspected ones. Men whispered this rumour to each other under strict injunctions as to secrecy, saying that all along they had known that the lawyer was not dead, but that hitherto they had not dared to speak. Some said that he had escaped from a window at the jail; some that the mob had released him; others that Login, being his friend, had opened the jail doors to him. But those who really knew kept their own counsel.

In the meantime, Login, guided by the papers which he had found on the schoolmaster's body, had departed hastily, carrying with him the proofs of death and pictures of the schoolmaster as he lay dead and of Archer as he had been in the day of his prosperity. And thus armed, he came at the close of an autumn day to that little village which spread along the "pike" in the pleasant blue-grass country. And the people there, ceasing their labours, gathered about the Sheriff or else in little groups to themselves, discussing this late strange happening and rehearsing old tales and legends; but when old Isaac was brought the matter was clarified, and the motives which had led to the money-lender's death were all at once made plain.

"Yas, sir," the old Negro had said, looking back across the fields at the house where for so many years he had lived and served. "Yas, sir, dat wuz de way of hit in dem ole days, an' dat's howcome

de man daid. Mars' Gawge he couldn' fergit—dey raised de man, Mars' Gawge an' Mars' Sammy dey played wid him, an' ole Mistis tuk keer o' him. His room up yander yit—right dar at de lef' o' de hall. Yas, sir, dey raised 'im—an'—an' Mars' Sammy he never come home—an' ole Mistis' she berried out dar een de gyardin—— Boss, dis yere's Kentucky —Mars' Gawge he *couldn'* fergit!"

But long before the Negro had concluded, the Sheriff had ceased to listen, for his mind was full of Billy Mayson and of the effect of this news on the fortunes of his friend. That night he turned his face homeward. His errand had been accomplished, and Billy Mayson's entire innocence was patent to all the world. So the tidings were spread in Bellville and throughout the Keowee country and the friends of the lawyer were glad.

It was in the midst of these things that the October court came on, but with the vanishing of Billy Mayson the case against Simpkins and his adherents had lost much of its importance. Before the day for its trial had arrived Johnson went quietly to the State's attorney and brought an argument to bear. Johnson said that it was not at all certain that Billy's absence was permanent, and he averred that "courtesy, sir, such as should by all means obtain between brethren at the bar," demanded that the event be postponed until a reasonable time had elapsed. In reality, Johnson knew that Jason Simpkins, fearing a summary punishment, had fled from the Keowee country, and he was afraid lest Shaw and Griggs, the men who had really employed him, should be held by the court liable "in the full amount" of Jason's forfeited bond.

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Bowers was not averse to postponing the matter. It is true that he saw quite clearly into the depths of Johnson's motives, and it is equally true that his own popularity just at the time would have been enhanced by a somewhat vigorous prosecution of the rioters. But on the other hand, it was necessary to consider Griggs and Shaw, who were still able to embarrass him and to do him political hurt. The State's attorney considered it wise to placate Griggs at least, but he did not wish to yield too readily, so for a time he appeared to hesitate. He was cognisant, he said, of Johnson's high standard of professional ethics, but that in this case his own sense of duty was "very strong, my dear sir, very strong indeed!" Then Johnson, pressing his advantage, spoke with admiring unction, and Bowers in the end made a speech extolling the virtues of Billy Mayson. A misapprehension had existed, he said, and a strong necessity had arisen that his young and able colleague be vindicated "before the bar of this court, sir, and before the assembled people!" It was a very pretty speech, and a great many men congratulated Bowers on his loyalty to his absent friend. The case against Simpkins was continued.

When after the adjournment of the court a report of this address was brought to the ears of Mrs. Chambliss, she smiled a little bitterly, for she had been trying to find Billy Mayson and her efforts had been in vain. Login, too, had written letters and sent telegrams, and had even gone so far as to insert advertisements in the newspapers, but all without the slightest result. So, for aught that Mrs. Chambliss knew, Billy was an outcast and hungry—he might even be dying, she thought—and now these

people in Bellville who might have shown faith in him, who might have aided him, who might have averted this catastrophe, were sitting down in smug conceit and saying pleasant words about him!

"How little the great herd changes!" she remarked to Annie, who, her fingers busied with some sewing, was seated beside the windows. "First they crucify a man, then when it is all too late they begin to worship him."

The girl did not answer immediately, for her thoughts were far away and her eyes were fixed on the brown, bare fields, the parti-coloured October woods, and the fence-rows where the hedge-sparrows in little flocks rose with a rush of fluttering wings and whirled aloft and settled down again like flying leaves driven before the wind. How thin and pale the sunlight seemed—the sunlight that was streaming through the half-stripped branches of the apple-trees—and how lonely the road along which a single wagon was creeping.

Little by little the wagon drew away to the north, and beyond it a speck which presently took the shape of a man appeared in that dusty line which marked the course of the road. As the team drew near the man swung aside and passed it, then came on steadily in a long and slouching stride. At the opening of the lane he hesitated, then turned, and the girl caught her breath sharply; but at his next movement her heart sank suddenly, for she recognised the lank and shambling figure—it was Luke come up from some cause out of the river swamps.

With a sigh she started for the porch to meet him, for it was evident that he was seeking either herself or her mother. What had happened, she wondered? Surely something, else Luke would never have



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dared travel the road in the light of the open day. Mrs. Binns was in some sore strait, no doubt, or perhaps Parmeely was ill. These Billy had given into her charge and these she had cared for religiously. When he came again—he *would* come again, she told herself fiercely—he should know by her works that she at least had remembered him.

At the steps the man halted, twirling his hat in his hands and shuffling his feet shamefacedly.

"Come in, Luke!" she invited, but she remained standing nevertheless.

He took his seat on the steps, hesitating and groping for words.

"Mis'—Mis' Annie, hit don't happen as you has heerd f'um Billy—f'um Mr. Mayson—any time lately, has yer?"

She was a little surprised at the tenor of the question. "No," she answered; "have you, Luke?"

"No'm. I wuz jes' axin'. I wuz a-wantin' ter hear f'um him, fer I blames myse'f fer a lot er this yere trouble—yas'm, partly so, I does. Yer see, Billy he use ter be good ter me. Ev'n when we wuz boys he war right smart good ter me, an' I blames myse'f 'at I didn' see whar all this yere racket wuz a-leadin' too. Unk' Jason he couldn' ha' started this devilment so easy less'n I had a-he'ped him, but hit war not in my mine ter hurt Billy Mayson—why, I wuddent ev'n tetch them ole wimmin ner go anyways a-nigh his place—but I he'ped Unk' Jason an' Unk' Jason ketched 'is holt an' then he done ez he pleased. Now when I needs a fren' Billy Mayson he air druv off an' Unk' Jason Simkins he air done clu'ed out an' gone, nobody knows whar."

"Can I help you, Luke?" Annie was accustomed

to the rambling and roundabout speech which the poor white class affect, and she was anxious to know at once what the man had in mind.

"I come ter see," he answered simply. "Ef Billy Mayson had a-been here I would ha' gone ter him. Mar she went ter 'im onst—she 'lows 'at he wuddent do nothin' fer we-alls then, but hit may be that she didn' understan'—that she didn' jes' know whut Billy wuz about——"

Annie moved uneasily. "She didn't know, Luke, and she doesn't know now," she exclaimed impulsively; "why, the very bread——" she stopped suddenly, but her eyes had grown bright and her cheeks were very red.

Luke nodded. "I 'spected hit!" he said. "Hit war like Billy Mayson, an' I more'n spected hit, but I hain't said a word. Mar she air kinder stiff-necked an' proud—she wudden' ha' tuk hit ef she hed knowed. But I hain't that way. Billy he war nigh about right an' I has been right smart of a fool. But now I wants ter stop hit, Mis' Annie. I wants ter go ter work an' try ter make a livin' fer that thar ole mammy o' mine! Kin yer give me a chanst, Mis' Annie? I wants ter give up ter ther Sher'ff an' I wants yer ter he'p me git somebody ter go on my bon' ontel ther trile comes off."

The plea was a common and rather a cheap one, but it touched the girl, ignorant as she was of the shifts and turns of criminality. Still she knew Luke and she believed that he was speaking honestly.

"I will try to arrange it," she replied. "I think Mr. Mayson would like to have me do that much for you. Afterward you may come here and work for awhile. We need a white man—but, mind you,

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he must be a good one, Luke! Afterward, when the trial occurs——”

“I is a-gwine ter plead guilty,” he interpolated, looking down at the ground.

“If you do,” she went on hopefully, “they may let you pay a fine. If so, I will attend to it for you. If not—then you must be a man, Luke! Can you go to the penitentiary for your mother’s sake, Luke? Can you serve your time faithfully, and can you come back in the end a clean man and honest?”

The muscles of the fellow’s face had begun to twitch painfully and he turned his head away. “I kin!” he answered hoarsely, “an’ I will!”

She went down to where he stood and held out her hand to him. “Then,” she said, “you may depend on me! Go home to-night and tell your mother about it and to-morrow I will meet you in Bellville.”

When he had gone she turned back into the house. Out of the sight of his agitated face she began to be a little doubtful, but he had come, she reflected, with Billy Mayson’s name on his lips, and for Billy Mayson’s sake she would succour him.

But whatever the probabilities against the girl were, she had not erred in her estimate of Luke, and as the poor white strode along the highway leading to the Jester place he took serious counsel with himself and later he pushed back his hat from his forehead and sang. For a new earth seemed opened up to him, and the hope that had been so often crushed was all alive again. Certainly the spring would come and with it danger and perhaps imprisonment, but your man of Luke Binns’s class has learned too well for his own best purposes that

to-morrow is but a will-of-the-wisp which is ever moving on.

So Luke was happy, and when he came through the purple-gray shadows to the pine tree at the front of the tumble-down house it was growing very dark, but he stopped and leaned against the rough and distorted trunk, and raising his hands to his mouth he whistled shrilly and waited.

Up in front of the house a woman and a girl stood peering into the dusk and the woman raised her hand and listened.

"Hit air Luke!" she exclaimed. "Maybe he air hongry! Run, Parmeely, run an' fetch whut bread thar is!" Then, without waiting for the child's return, she drew her apron about her head and hurried toward the road.

"Luke!" she called warningly. "Luke! Some un mout pass an' see yer thar!"

But Luke laughed and came forward and took her by the arm. "I don't keer ef they does, mammy," he replied. "I is done come home fer good. I went ter see Mis' Annie this evenin'—she 'lows 'at she air a-managin' things fer Billy Mayson, she do—an' she is done promussed ter go my bon' an' ter he'p me."

The woman smoothed his coat-sleeve tenderly. "Shore," she remarked dubiously, "hit 'ull be good ter have yer home agin—but—but does yer reckon 'at she kin git 'em ter cl'ur yer. Does yer reckon they won't put yer in ther pen?"

He squared his shoulders and looked straight ahead. "Ef they does," he answered stubbornly, "I 'ull jes' go thar, an' when I gits out I 'ull come home an' take keer o' you!"

It was a new tone to the woman, accustomed as

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she had been to groans and to bitter complainings, but this was her son, and though others might doubt, she would believe in him.

"So yer will, Luke," she cried, with a laugh that hid her unshed tears. "So yer will, my boy! Yer ole mammy jes' knows 'at yer will!" Then as Parmeely came meeting them they went in together and sat down.

"Whar's pappy?" asked Luke after a pause.

"Oh, he have gone ter Keowee. Yer Unk' Jason he have writ ter us, an' yer par's a gwine ter move inter that thar house whut he built. Be you a comin' wi' us?"

Luke shook his head. "I is promussed ter work fer Mis' Cham'lis'," he answered reflectively.

His mother looked into the fire. "We owes Mis' Cham'lis' some money," she remarked very slowly. "She have been a-he'pin' of us."

"Yas," replied her son, "I knows. I'll ten' ter that thar."

The woman looked at him with a feeling which was akin to wonder. This boy whom she had reared had come suddenly to be a man—a man sufficient unto himself and strong. Already he seemed to be lifting the heavy burdens from her worn old shoulders, and when Long Jerry came and she pointed to the door of an inner room there was a thrill of pride in her voice as she whispered:

"Luke he have come!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

NEAR THE TOWN OF TOXAWAY

KOEWEB is a Cherokee name. Once the red man loved the hills that lie about the town, and even to this day the rufous soil when stirred by the husband-man's plow gives up his arrow-heads and the blades of his spears in evidence of his tenantry. Across a corner of the Mayson place—a corner still shadowed and sheltered by a thinned-out remnant of the great primeval forest—a shallow depression notches the shoulder of a narrow ridge and stretches down toward the creek. Out beyond the edge of the trees other gullies abound, but this is no water-worn trace, nor is there a stream here in the days of the winter rain. Rather it is an Indian trail, over which the moccasined feet were wont to pass bearing deerskins and beaver to Charleston, or transporting the goods of the white man back to the lodges on the "Long Canes" or by the foaming Tugaloo. And the ridges, tree-clad to their summits and stretching away into the hazy distance, were for these silent passers-by a refuge and a resting-place in the long, hot summer days.

"*Quoo-ran-he-qua*" they called these—"the hills where the white oaks grow"—but the white men could not "frame to pronounce" the word and said instead "Conakka."

In the aftertime the tribe was removing West—a great caravan of men and wagons and cattle, and

women and dusky children, guarded and hedged about by a regiment of blue-coated soldiery—and the journey bore heavily upon them, and homesickness came and many there were who died and were buried beside the way. But the wife of the chief, young and strong and full, withal, of the dusky beauty peculiar to her race, bore herself bravely until the yellow Mississippi was past. But afterward, as they journeyed across the endless reaches of the swamp-land and swam the sluggish bayous, a fever seized her and she longed for the opalescent light of the hills and the sound of the running brooks and the noise of the falling water. So they came to the White—the beautiful river where the blue water glides and ripples between banks of snowy sand—and they halted there. And the woman, parched with the fever, looked out upon the river and its beauty seemed a mockery, but when she closed her eyes the long, green ridges arose and the babbling brooks seemed to call to her and the acorns began to fall. "*Quoo-ran-he-qua!*" she cried—and died.

Then the women of the tribe beat their breasts and the stoic-faced hunters—those who were left of them—went down to the water's edge and gazed at the thick canebrake on the other side.

"Here we overpass," they said. "*Taksawahiu!*—it is the place of wailing!"

But the soldiers could not recall the word. "Toxaway," essayed some, others said bluntly, "The Cherokee Ford."

The village of Toxaway stands on a sand-bluff and overlooks the stream. On the river-front there are sawmills and a deserted steamboat-landing. The one business street is flanked by wooden stores,

shaded by mulberry trees, and roamed over by vagrant hogs, while those devoted to dwellings are bordered on by vacant lots as well, upon which in the summer the yellow-blossomed "bitter-weed" grows. North, east, south and west the black, fertile farmlands lie; across the river there is a tangled wilderness of cane.

At one time—in those early and half-legendary days during which the place was called Cherokee Ford—there were dance-halls and saloons on that street which faced the river, and when the big "stern-wheelers" tied up at the landing the town took its pleasures freely and held nothing in reserve. Later, as the farms were opened and wealth was accumulated, and the necessity for protecting their property forced the citizens into a semblance of rude conservatism, a court-house was established and two churches were built and the men and women of "Front" Street were asked to move farther on. Then, owing to her waterway and her flat-bottomed boats, an era of prosperity dawned, so that the people became purse-proud; and when the projectors of a railway came, asking a subscription and promising benefits in return, the "prominent citizens" laughed scornfully. "What lacketh Toxaway yet?" they questioned mockingly. Hence it is that now Toxaway languishes, for the railroad passes a mile to the south, and her boats have disappeared or else they lie rotting high and dry on the sand-bars that fringe the stream.

But along in the later eighties of that century which is barely past "The Memphis Packet" still made its weekly trips between Toxaway and the city, and on that morning in October which marked the opening of the circuit court in Bellville, this big,



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white, handsome boat was rounding the bends of the White about three miles below the town. There were very few passengers on board, however, the whole list comprising but a Negro or two, three planters from the "down river" landings, and a tall, broad-shouldered young man whose yellow hair had recently been clipped quite short and whose blond skin appeared in places to be oddly stained with a darker colour. This man held himself somewhat aloof, but regarded his surroundings with an interest which marked him as a stranger to such a scene as the journey now afforded—a scene composed of the winding stream, the willow-fringed banks, and the almost impenetrable thickets of cane which were broken only occasionally by tiny clearings or the solitary hut of a fisherman.

But as the boat ascended the current, bend succeeding bend and the outlook remaining ever the same, the young man grew restless, and presently a shadow of dejection seemed to overcast his face. Noticing this, one of his fellow-passengers, who had for some moments been rather stealthily regarding him, approached and waved his hand.

"That's a pretty thick tangle, isn't it?" he remarked, indicating a certain spot on the shore where the wild grapevines had interlaced themselves among the tops of the closely set growth.

The younger man brightened a little as he turned to answer. "It is, indeed!" he said. "But can you venture to tell me, sir, what has become of those great plantations which common report places somewhere hereabout?"

The other man—a big, bluff fellow with soft, brown eyes and cheeks that were a fraction too ruddy—looked at his interlocutor quizzically.

"You're new to this part of the country, I take it," he replied, "otherwise it would be plain to you that this canebrake which you see before you is the 'low bottom,' so called—a tract which is subject to overflow two or three times a year and therefore useless to the farmer save as a pasture for his cattle. Back yonder a mile or so the land is much higher—overflow doesn't touch it except it be on the 'spring rise,' and only partially then. It is there that the farmlands lie. Goin' to stop off at Toxaway? It's a pretty slow town, but there's some fine land in its neighbourhood."

"Yes, I'm on my first visit there. Can you tell me anything of the place?"

"Oh, yes, of course! I live just ten miles below—ten miles by land, more than twenty by the river: the bends make the difference, you see. Toxaway used to be a good town, and there are some clever people there. Not much doing, however, except in a farming way. Say, my name is Gale. Originally I am from Kentucky, but I've been out here on the White for nearly thirty years. I'm always glad to meet you young fellows who come following in my footsteps." He extended his hand affably and smiled.

The younger man's face flushed with a sudden pleasure. During many days of his wanderings he had been forced to hold himself apart from everyone or else to lodge with the Negroes—a thing repugnant to even the least fastidious of the Southern whites—and afterward when he had reached Memphis the city folk had been immersed in their own affairs and his conversation had been the "yea, yea" and the "nay, nay" of the calculating business world. Besides, his colour, as yet



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only partially restored, might after a close inspection have excited painful suspicions. But here in this new land to which he had come a hand was stretched out to him.

"Mine is Mayson," he returned heartily. Never for a moment did he hesitate: it was a good name, and let that come which might he was resolved that he would not disown it. "I'm very glad to meet you, Mr. Gale. I have travelled, you perceive—this time from the East to the West."

Gale smiled significantly. "I have been in the East," he replied, "also in the West and the South. But yonder is Toxaway."

He stood pointing with his finger, and Billy saw straight ahead the landing, the steep front of the bluff, and the roofs of a cluster of houses. Almost at the same instant the boat's whistle sounded a hoarse alarm, the pilot's bell tinkled sharply, and the speed of the engines was reduced. Five minutes later the gangplank was being lowered.

As Billy and Gale stepped ashore the landing seethed with confusion, and two brawny Negroes with strips of metal attached to their shabby hats detached themselves from the crowd. These, as the passengers approached, began to cry drawlingly:

"Proctor 'Ouse!"

"R-i-i-verside Ho-tel!"

"Dis er way, boss! Y-e-e-re de Proctor 'Ouse!"

"I'd advise you to try the Riverside," muttered Gale in an undertone. "I fancy it's a fraction the better. I've an engagement for to-day, but I'll be up there about supper time, when I hope to see you again."

Following the suggestion of his companion, Billy pointed out his valise to the porter, then climbed

to the top of the incline and looked curiously about him at the shady but unkempt streets, the passing people, and those marked signs of dilapidation which already the cheap pine buildings had begun to assume. It was little more than chance which had brought him to this out-of-the-way spot. In Memphis an examination of his pocketbook had revealed to him that he was drawing heavily upon the slender sum which yet remained therein. Mammy Nancy's savings had served him well, had brought him thus far in comparative comfort, and had enabled him to replace the wardrobe and the many little accessories to endurable life which he had been forced to leave behind him; but the sum, even though it bore an "obi" woman's blessing, had no power of expanding itself. Hence it had been plain to Billy that he must find wherewith to maintain himself, and that very speedily.

But a city is no place for that man who is at once poor and sensitive, and experience had taught Billy this; so he had gone quietly to his boarding-house and had taken down the half-worn map which adorned the bare room called "the office." And as he had studied this map, his eyes wandering over the sheet, he had fallen upon the name "Toxaway," followed by the parenthesis, "Cherokee Ford." Cherokee—there was a suggestion of home in the word. Just above the Cherokee ford away back yonder in the Keowee country Annie Chambliss and her mother lived. It was necessary to go somewhere—why not to the Cherokee Ford? And so he had come.

As he stood at the top of the bluff and looked first at the quiet village, then out across the river, where the little waves were sparkling in the noon-



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day sun, the future did not seem reassuring. To a man who had been born here—to a man who loved the great sweeping curves of this stately river, the lazy and crawling blue water and the broad level stretches of the farms, it would be pleasant no doubt to work ploddingly in this place during all the remainder of his days, to sit at a desk during the daylight hours, and to lie at evening under the spreading trees and there listen to the everchanging voice of the stream and to the sound of the wind in the mulberry leaves; but Billy Mayson was a man of the hills, and as his eye sought the eastern horizon a great wave of homesickness came upon him unawares. Around him, save for the trees, the circle of the sky was a clear unbroken line, and there was not even a low-lying cloud to personate for him the ridges for which he longed and the blue haze which rests on Conakka.

Dropping his glance to the street, he caught his breath sharply and turned away. A few yards farther on, a rickety building, two stories high and painted a sickly green, thrust, shovel-like, the floor of its flat-roofed piazza down flush with the level of the sandy street. Above this piazza a sign-board had been erected; it read, "Riverside Hotel." Billy walked slowly until he came to the place, then he turned inside.

With the sunset, however, Gale appeared according to the programme which he had previously announced, and Billy was honestly glad. The farmer found the young man sitting on the piazza and straightway established himself beside him.

"Well," he asked cheerfully, "like the town?"

"U-mm-mm!" replied the younger doubtfully. "I can't say. I don't know much about it yet,

you understand. Guess I'll get used to things after awhile."

"Yes, indeed! Get used to 'em most too soon, if you're anything like me. I—I haven't been back to Kentucky yet, but some day I'm going. I'm too busy now, but when I get older I'll go back there to stay. By the way, what is it that you intend to do? Buy land and farm?"

Billy's forehead drew itself up in fine little lines. "I'll be frank with you," he answered. "I've got no money, or next to none, and I've got to go to work. I thought I'd try it here."

Gale bit his mustache. "What can you do?" he inquired.

Billy laughed. "Not much of anything that's of the least use, I'm afraid. I've a general education, have had the ambition pretty well cuffed out of me, and I'm ready to turn my hand to anything that is decent. No, I don't know anything that is worth while, but I guess I will be able to learn."

The other man looked thoughtful and threw the stump of his cigar across to the edge of the sidewalk. A pig came and nosed at the burning tobacco and the man watched it intently. Suddenly he turned to Billy.

"You might go out to my place with me," he said. "Of course I don't insist, because you probably won't consider the offer, but the fact is I need a man. You could help me for a week or two, or a month or two—just as you choose about that—and in the meantime you could knock about the country and get your bearings. There isn't anything in this to speak of—thirty a month, perhaps, or something like that—but you would be making expenses while you waited. I have a little country

store on my plantation—a commissary they call it out here—and you would have to look after that. Now I just mention this——”

“I’ll go with you,” interrupted Billy decisively, “and I’m glad you’re giving me the opportunity. Now as to my position and my duties there?”

“Oh, the work ’ll not be very troublesome. You are to keep the accounts, weigh up the cotton each night at the various cotton-barns, keep general oversight of the labourers, and pay them their wages if any be due.”

“And what,” asked Billy, “if some become dissatisfied?”

Gale chuckled. “It’ll hardly happen so,” he returned. “I see the supper is served—let us go in. We will make an early start in the morning, so we’d best go early to bed. I don’t go back by the boat, you see. My horses are here and we will drive out.”

With the problem of his maintenance thus easily and for the present definitely solved, Billy slept soundly that night, but before the sun rose next morning he was astir. A few moments later Gale called for him and together they drove southward over the long, straight roads, the hoofs of the spirited horses falling with a muffled sound upon the deep and powdery dust, and the fences and the fields gliding by, and thus they came in due season to the low white house in which the planter lived.

As they approached, Billy looked at the place and its surroundings with a certain interest. On every hand the fields, now cumbered with the refuse of the past year’s crop, stretched away with never a swell nor a hillock to mar their even surfaces; between these, and flanked by shallow ditches, the

road appeared as an elevated line. In front of him was the house, the barns and the outlying buildings, sheltered by a cluster of trees; while just at the edge of the highway, and readily distinguishable by means of its heavy door and its "cross-battened," nail-studded window-shutters, the rather diminutive storehouse stood. Beyond this and far to the west a line of heavy timber broke the symmetry of the horizon and marked, said Gale, the "low bottom" and the limit of the "cattle range."

"Well," remarked the planter easily, as they drew up in front of the picket fence by which the dwelling was enclosed, "we stop here."

Billy leaped to the ground, and his employer, handing over the team to the Negro who had come to receive it, led the way into the house.

"Bachelor quarters," exclaimed Gale, as he pushed open the door of a room. "You may find us a little rough, Mayson, but old Sukey will see that you are comfortable, I'm sure. Just make yourself at home, now. Breakfast's ready whenever you are."

It was after such wise that Billy Mayson was ushered into his new station in life—that of store-keeper and general factotum on Gale's plantation, but he did not suffer thereby, and he fell readily into the habits of the place. It was rather a crude life—calm, peaceful and bovine—but it had the merit of quietude. Billy's mornings were almost entirely his own. In these he might shoot or walk or read. In the afternoon he made the rounds of the cotton-barns, weighing in and noting the contents of each labourer's basket. At evening he kept the store, now supplying some Negro's need, now watching

the glitter of the stars. At nine he closed up and plodded away to bed.

His employer he soon found to be one who stayed little at home, so as a rule Billy was left to his own devices. Gale was frank and good-natured, and there his good qualities ended. For the rest, he was fond of his ease and of his cups, and did not care to be troubled with the petty details of management.

Billy was by no means unwilling thus to be left to himself. Never demonstrative in his habits, he did not now care to babble into any person's ear the full tale of his past, and in his isolation he became a very silent man who performed his work as best he might and faced his life impassively.

But after the crisp days of October were gone, and the nights had grown long and the winter winds had begun to strip the trees and to howl about the corners of the house, he would sit sometimes in his room watching the shadows come and go and the firelight play upon the walls, and at such times he would wonder what Annie had thought of his flight and whether she had forgotten him. As for his own part, he felt that he had failed, that he had abandoned the fight, and that it was well that he had crept away here like a medieval monk to his cell. And yet even as he thought of it he would set his jaw firmly and his eye would light up and he would almost rise from his chair. But the months passed and Gale was satisfied, and Billy, spurred to no exertion, worked on mechanically and sank gradually into the spiritual stupor of a half-contented hopelessness.

The winter that followed was mild even for the South. There was much rain along the White, but

snow was totally lacking, and with the coming of January there came also a week in which the sun shone warm and bright and the clear air held just enough of the frost to send the blood leaping in the veins. On the last day of this week Billy was lonely, for Gale was away as usual and the Negroes were still busy with their Christmas pleasurings, hence even the storehouse was deserted. So Billy sat outside in the sunshine and smoked his pipe and watched the length of sodden road that lay stretched toward Toxaway. Soon the winter would be past, he mused, and spring would come. It is possible for a man to live long in much less time than a year! Last spring seemed removed from him by a distance covering centuries.

"Boss!"

He turned in surprise. So absorbed had he been in his reverie that he had not discerned the approach of the plantation foreman who had come up quietly. Now he looked at the Negro and questioned with a movement of his brows.

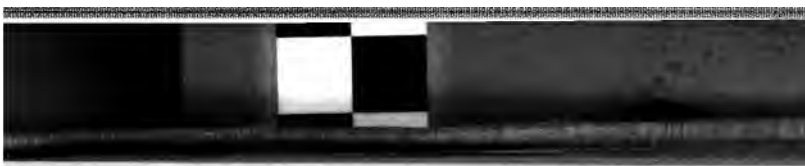
"Boss, dar's a mighty sick nigger down yonder ter my house. I'se afeerd he's a-gwine ter die. I wish you would come down dar an' look at 'im, please, sah?"

"Is it one of our hands?"

"No, sah. Seems ter be a stranger lak. I foun' 'im a-layin' side de road las' night an' I fotch 'im home wid me. Yas, sah, I nigh 'bout had ter tote 'im. He couldn' skyurcely walk!"

Billy arose. When the Negroes were ailing they came to him, then, if the occasion required it, a physician was summoned from the village.

"All right, Dock!" he replied. "Help me to close up and then I will be ready."



CHAPTER XXIX

THE SICK MAN

ON the day preceding that on which Billy was summoned by the foreman, a Negro had come stumbling along the narrow road through the cane-brake opposite Toxaway and had halted at the ferry. The boat was on the other side, and the wayfarer, seeing that his pockets were empty and that he had naught wherewith to pay, could not summon the hardihood to call to the ferryman. Besides, he was sick; to draw his breath deeply pained him like the stab of a dagger, and his eyes were bloodshot and heavy.

Ten days before he had set out from a lumber camp in the hills that lie westward from Toxaway and had turned his footsteps to the east, for much travel and long months of exposure had told upon him and his strength was beginning to wane. Negroes are not common in the lumber camps, nor are they desired overmuch. Moreover, the foreman of the camp was a hard man and the other workmen were whites of a very inferior class.

"This Negro is worthless," they had said, "therefore he must go!"

And he had gone.

At the ferry he stretched himself out on the sand and pillowed his head on a little bundle which was carefully wrapped in an old red handkerchief. It seemed to him that sometime the ferry-boat must

come across, and then since it would be no trouble it might be that the ferryman would give him passage and would not greatly abuse him because he was penniless. It had been a long time since he had slept under a roof, but he was ill now. There were cotton fields across the river—cotton fields and cabins—for wherever the cotton grows there are people of his kind. So he laid himself down and waited.

Then the sun climbed higher and its rays fell on the sand and on his fevered forehead, and a troubled doze closed his eyes and relieved for a little while his pain and his weariness and his misery. Then on the other side a man came down with a wagon, desiring to be set across.

As the ferryman landed the wagon he looked at the figure on the sand. It is common enough in summer to see Negroes asleep in the sun, but in winter it is different.

"Hello, Buster!" called the ferryman from his boat. "Whut air ye doin' thar?" But the Negro only stirred a little and groaned and did not answer.

The white man stepped ashore, fastened his boat-chain to a stake, and went and stood over the sleeper. The Negro stirred again and muttered.

"Mammy!" he said. "Mammy Clairsy! Is ole Marster come home yit?"

"Here! Here!" called the white man, shaking him by the shoulder.

The Negro rubbed his eyes and struggled drunkenly to his feet, but some moments elapsed before he could collect his senses. At last, however, he saw the boat and realised that his opportunity had come.



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"Boss," he said quite simply, "I wants ter git across."

"Ten cents!" answered the man, extending an oar-hardened palm.

The Negro cast down his eyes. "Boss," he replied very humbly, "I'se sick an' I ain't got nothin'."

The ferryman looked at him sharply. His skin was leaden-gray, his clothing a mass of filthy rags, his bones seemed ready to pierce the skin—evidently he was telling no lie.

"Git in!" said the white man laconically, as he turned back to the river.

The Negro obeyed. At the other bank he crawled rather than walked up the bluff; at one of the stores he stopped. His appearance was so wretched that the shopkeeper pitied him and offered him a handful of crackers.

"I thanks yer, Boss," he replied weakly, "but I ain't hongry now—I jes' wants a moufful er water."

When he had drunken he went on.

"That nigger's in a blamed bad fix," remarked the storekeeper to a customer who was standing by.

When the Negro reached the edge of the town he turned into the southerly road. That which had been dust in the autumn was mud now and the road was almost bottomless. His feet grew heavy with the clinging mire so that he could scarcely drag them after him. As he walked he tottered and held his hand to his side, and his breathing grew heavier. His spittle was reddish, like the rust which gathers on dirty iron. Sometimes his eyes were closed; at best they were only half open. He went on blindly.

When night overtook him he had almost reached

Gale's plantation, but his footsteps had grown very slow. At nine o'clock the darkness was intense. He stepped into a rut which had half filled with muddy water, stumbled, gasped, lurched across the road and fell. Twice he essayed to rise, then he crawled for a little space on his hands and knees; finally he sank down exhausted. When the moon rose unconsciousness had come.

At half-past eleven, Dock Washin'ton, who was a notable field-hand and the foreman of Gale's plantation, started homeward from the "meetin' house," where a hot supper had been held. Dock had eaten much but he had drunken still more, therefore he walked unsteadily and was entirely unwilling to risk himself in those paths which crossed the grass-covered fields. Because of this unwillingness he journeyed "roun' by de road."

As he came through the mud he sang, and afterward he observed the stars and the rising moon and spoke to these jeeringly, but when he had almost reached his house and his bed he saw just in front of him a limp form sprawling by the edge of a ditch, and he halted to identify it.

"Humph!" he ejaculated self-righteously. "Dar's a man a heap drunker'n I is!" He went up to the figure and shook it.

"Cul!" he called enticingly. "Oh, Cul! Is yer got any mo' of hit 'bout yer?"

The sick man opened his eyes. "I kain't git no funder," he groaned.

Dock sat beside him on the ground and lectured him. "Yo' hadn't orter drunk so much," he said. "Hit's pow'ful bad fer yer innards."

"Ef I could jes' git ter my feet——!" said the other man presently.

"My head's a-swimmin'," replied Dock. "Hit might' nigh allers swims endurin' of a moonlight night, but hit mout be I could git yer up ef ye ain't stucken too tight."

"Try hit!" pleaded the other weakly.

The foreman arose and caught the stranger underneath the arms, and the other moaned but held on desperately. After an effort the foreman got himself straightened.

"Come 'long now," he said, and together they went away staggering. Upon reaching the cabin Dock dropped his burden on the floor. "Lay down dar an' sleep hit off," he counselled, and forthwith clambered into bed and went to sleep himself; but next morning he was startled, for when he looked at the stranger he feared that he had picked up a corpse. What Negro was this, anyway, and where had he come from?

The sick man gave him no answer, for he lay in a stupor, and one hand clutched with a pitiful insistence his poor little dirty-red bundle.

Startled and compassionate now that he was sober, Dock went in haste for Unk' Ike Bussy, a "yaller man" famed for the marvellous remedies which he compounded from "roots and yarbs," and when he found the wizard missing he hurried off after Billy Mayson. The nearest physician was at Toxaway, and it required an order from "de white folks" to bring him as far as Gale's plantation.

Upon Billy's arrival at the cabin he found the sick man in the foreman's bed, his breath coming in gasps and catches and his face turned to the wall. It required no second glance to see that the illness was desperate and that there was no time to be lost. Billy turned to Dock.

"Go for the doctor!" he said sharply; then he leaned forward, looked into the sick man's face and started.

"Abram!" he exclaimed, "Abram, how came you here?"

The Negro opened his eyes. The delirium of the fever was upon him and the present was blotted from his mind, but he was a "Mayson nigger," and from somewhere out of the shadows—the dark and heavy shadows that pressed upon him and encompassed him—his master had called to him. He thrust the bedclothes back and struggled vainly to rise.

"Comin', Mars' Billy," he answered; "I'se comin' *now!*"

This loyalty, this blind and unreasoning obedience, brought the quick tears to Billy's eyes. "Lie still, Abram!" he commanded gently. "Lie still, old friend, and take your rest!"

"Mars' Billy!" Groping as if in the darkness, the Negro stretched out his hands until the white man reached over and touched him, then with a sigh of relief he dropped his head on the pillow again.

In the afternoon the doctor came. "Pneumonia," he said, "and a bad case at that. A white man, because of good nursing and intelligent attention, might pull through, but a Negro lacks all that, and——"

"I am going to nurse him myself," interrupted Billy sententiously.

The physician looked his surprise. "You?" he questioned.

"Yes," answered Billy, "I—— I shall send Dock to another cabin. I know this man."

A week later Abram opened his eyes. "Is you dar, Mars' Billy?" he called.

"I am here, Abram."

"You is dar, ain't you, Mars' Billy? I ain't a dreamin' none, is I?"

"You are awake, I think. I am with you, at any rate."

"Ole marster he air well, ain't he? An' mammy—does yer know ef mammy air well, Mars' Billy?"

Billy bowed his head. "Your old master is dead, Abram," he answered, "and I have been much too long away from Keowee to attempt to speak of Aunt Clairsy."

The Negro turned himself about and lay for a moment thinking, then a troubled look came into his face. "Mars' Billy," he remarked presently, "I'se got a paper whut b'longed ter ole marster. I didn' aim fer ter take hit, an' I is been a-keepin' of hit fer ter kyar back ter him."

Billy scarcely heard. It was some trifling scrap, no doubt, which the Negro had taken unwittingly and had preserved. "Yes," he answered soothingly, "but it doesn't matter now. Just lie still and rest."

"But I'd lak ter gie hit ter yer, Mars' Billy," the Negro persisted. "Hit seem lak I'll be mo' at my res' after I is done dat. Hit's right dar een my pocketbook." And thinking to humour his whim and to quiet him, Billy handed him the battered purse which he wished.

With weak and trembling fingers Abram loosed the fastening and produced a frayed and folded sheet. "Here hit is, Mars' Billy," he said.

Billy took the paper and opened it and then

suddenly his face went white. "Archer," he gasped in astonishment. "Archer! The scoundrel!"

Then as his colour came back he stopped and stood lost in thought. How much this would have meant to him once—how little now! Of what use was this tardy justice which had come in this strange wise to him? He could not go back—— Suddenly his determination flamed. He would go back: he would take up the fight where he had left it. As for those who accused him, let them hang him if they were able. Springing to his feet, he laughed. Already it seemed to him as if there were no more danger to be reckoned with, and he thought of the Mayson place, of the sunlight falling through the trees, and of Annie. He turned to the Negro.

"We're going home, Abram," he said very softly, "going home, you and I! Going back to the good hill-country, to your people and to mine!"



CHAPTER XXX

THE COMING OF THE SPRING

FEBRUARY in the Keowee country and in Bellville opened with a sharp frost which was followed by snow. The winter, hitherto so mild, seemed to arouse as it neared its end and to put forth the utmost of its power. The trees at the Mayson place rose naked and gaunt against the cold white background of the inclement sky, and the hedges about the fields of the Chambliss farm bent before the keen wind and shuddered as the blasts whistled through the fencing and went sweeping across the opens. On the day after the fall of the snow Bellville put on its holiday aspect, and the streets rang with laughter and with improvised sleigh-bells, and the sidewalks grew slippery under the runners of the sleds. Still Bellville is too far south for a snow to be entirely welcome, and as night came on the people, tired of this new plaything and nipped withal by the keen and frosty air, withdrew to their comfortable firesides, leaving the outside world to those who must needs be abroad and to the light of the scintillating stars. Afterward, the night train came in late because of the drifts, so that Billy Mayson and Abram, stepping from the rearmost coach into the dim circles cast by the station lamps, saw nothing but the deserted street and the houses wrapped in snow as if in a winding-sheet.

As Billy reached the edge of the pavement he

drew his overcoat closer about his shoulders and shivered. Already the train was gliding away, and looking out across the town he could see the front of the jail looming up like a shadow in the darkness. But even had his courage failed him it was too late to step backward now. He crossed the platform, then turned to Abram and thrust something into the Negro's hand.

"Go up to the old hotel," he said; "tell Maum Tempe that I sent you and she will lodge you to-night. To-morrow you will come to me at the jail."

A form indistinct in the shadow stepped out from the angle of the station-house wall.

"Ain't dat Mister Mayson?" There was a quaver of pleasure in the tones and the shadow reached upward presumably to doff its hat.

Billy smiled. "Jake?" he answered. "Is that you, Jake?"

"Yassir. Dis me sho'! I come ter fetch some baggage down. Now I'se glad kase I met yer fus'. Got anything ter kyar up, boss—ef yer has, jes' han' hit yere. We-alls is been a-lookin' fer you."

Billy motioned to his companion. "You can take Abram in charge," he replied.

Jake's face fell. "Ain't you gwine too, boss? Ain't yer gwine up ter de house?" he asked.

"No; I have business at the jail."

Jake brightened at once. "Oh, 'tain't no use er yo' gwine by dar," he remarked. "Ef hit's any thing er yourn up dar I kin go an' fetch hit right straight."

"There's nothing!" returned Billy abruptly. "Take Abram to the house and take care of him!"

After the Negroes had departed, Billy turned the

nearest corner and went on toward the prison. Tonight he would tax Jackson's hospitality, he told himself; to-morrow he would see Kyle and apply to be released on a bond. He had just turned the next corner when he met the Sheriff face to face.

"Well, Login," he said quietly. "I'm back. I'll stay here this time, my friend."

Login thrust out his hand. "Sure!" he yelled joyously. "Where else *would* you stay? Why didn't you write to me? I was afraid that you hadn't heard."

"Heard what?" asked Billy, with a queer contraction of the heart. "I've heard nothing. What is there to hear?"

"He don't know!" roared the Sheriff. "'Fore Heaven, he don't know! Why, Billy, man, we've found it all out! We've found the chap who killed Archer!"

Billy stood as if stunned. He had nerved himself to struggle for his life—had come back to Bellville with his fists clenched and every muscle drawn taut to find that he was fighting thin air. There had been a nightmare and now he had awakened. Events which had loomed large and threatening shrank suddenly to their true proportions—his moral perspective was restored. His lips moved silently and he drew a long breath of relief.

In some degree Login understood. "Come!" he said. "You've been under a strain and you're tired. Come home with me and go to bed; to-morrow we will talk and I will tell you everything."

They turned and went on together, but presently Billy raised his head. The Maysons were not a forgiving race, and a hard thought had come to this one.

"Login," he asked, "where's Simpkins?"

The Sheriff shrugged his shoulders. "Gone!" he replied. "Cleared out entirely! And," he added presently, "I think it is better so."

It was thus that Billy came back to Bellville and to the hills of the Mayson place, for next day, in spite of the snow and the urgings of Login and Kyle, he tore himself away from his court-house friends and journeyed on to Keowee.

At the Mayson place old Mammy Clairisy met Abram and promptly took him in charge.

"Yo' gwine ter stay wid me, Ab'm? Sholy yo' gwine ter stay wid me now?" she queried apprehensively, after she had welcomed and had fed him.

Abram looked aggrieved. "Who gwine ter ten' ter Mars' Billy den?" he asked. "Who gwine sweep out dat dar office an' who gwine bresh dem close an' dem shoes? Dat ar Jake he kain't ten' ter Mars' Billy lak I kin. He skacely *knows* Mars' Billy."

Old Clairisy laughed, a little hysterically perhaps. "Why——" she said, "why, as ter Mars' Billy—why, stayin' wid Mars' Billy is jes' de same as stayin' wid me. We-alls *b'longs* ter Mars' Billy."

But Billy, having left Abram with his mother, went on along the road and started down the slope to the creek, and as he came near the ford a wrinkled old woman standing in a cabin door shaded her eyes and looked across the glistening snow.

"It's him!" she called, although there was no one to hear; "it's him fer shore! It's my boy comin' home agin!"

Her footsteps were hurried as she came across the field, and he, perceiving her, stopped his horse and waited.

"I knowed yer would come," she cried, as he

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grasped her hands; "sonny, I knowed yer would come!" but Billy did not answer: there are times when words are inadequate.

"Get in the buggy, Mammy," he said after a moment of silence; "I wish you to go with me."

As they climbed the hill she talked to him hurriedly, but he answered like one in a dream. Then coming to the Chambliss lane, he turned the head of the horse inward and drew up in front of the gate. Ben Jim was there and he approached with a sweeping bow.

"Mis' Ma'y she in de house," he announced, "an' Miss Annie 'ull be down presen'ly."

Two months later Luke Sullivan was journeying on the Keowee road. With him there was another man and that one was holding forth volubly.

"Hit war a shame," he was saying, "'bout that thar trile! Yo' have not heerd f'um yer Unk' Jason yit, I reckins?"

"Naw," replied Luke, "we has not heerd."

"Yer Unk' Jason he war sharp—he got out'n hit in time. Like ez not, he nuvver will come back. That thar Mayson he come fer ter push ther case agin you fellers. I has heerd hit said 'at ef hit hadn't 'a' been fer Mayson you-all's mout ha' come clur."

"Mebbe so," was the laconic answer.

"Yer Unk' Jason cos' Shaw some money, didn't he?"

Luke's sleepy eyebrows raised themselves. "Naw," he ejaculated, "he did not. Shaw went on Unk' Jason's bon' an' he had ther bon' ter pay, but he tuk Unk' Jason's lan' an' he tuk Unk' Jason's hoss. I 'lows 'at Shaw made money out'n that thar bon'."

There was a touch of indignation in his drawing tones and the other veered the conversation.

"They sont a lot of 'em ter ther pen'," he remarked; "Wes' Teddards wuz 'mongst 'em. Some of yer 'scaped that thar."

Luke turned his quid in his cheek with a certain unction. "Them whut 'lowed they wuz guilty they wuz fined," he asserted, "an' them whut lied wuz penned. Billy Mayson loant me ther money ter pay whut they found me—t'others got thurs one place er another. I is doggoned glad ter be red o' hit all!"

The other man nodded. "I reckon so," he said sympathetically; "hit must ha' been pow'ful weary-in'. Hit seems ter me 'at that thar Mayson mout ha' done better 'an whut he did—hit seems ter me 'at he actid low down."

Luke's face flushed. "My ole mammy thinks diff'unt," he replied. "Maw she 'lows, she does, 'at Billy Mayson air ther whites' man ever raised in ther Keowee neighbourhood!"

But Billy, sitting in the spring sunshine in front of his office door, cared as little for the chatter of the men on the country roads as he did for that of the sparrows squabbling in the court-house square. He was vaguely dissatisfied, it is true, but that was because of the subtle change of demeanour which since his return Annie Chambliss had shown. She appeared to avoid him now, and when by any chance they were thrown together she seemed strangely troubled and was silent. He thought that she must be afraid that he had misconstrued her friendship and that he would grow presuming again. Ought he not to see her and tell her that he understood? Rising, he called for Abram.

"Bring my horse, Abram," he said, and when his



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order had been executed he mounted and rode away over the long, dusty Keowee road.

At the Mayson place he halted. Already the afternoon had come and the sunlight was streaming over the fields and thin wisps of tenuous smoke rose languidly from the edges of the bottoms. Far away in the upland fields the plowmen drove back and forth, calling to the mules and whooping, and from the green depths of the grain came the piping call of the partridge and the low whistle of his mate.

Billy dismounted and raised his eyes to the ridges and the distant white oak trees; in the garden the bees hummed drowsily, and the doves were calling from the pines. With a great content in his heart he fastened his horse and strode away along the paths, for out of the depths of his trouble the land had come back to him. Yonder were his graves—his mother's grave and his grandfather's—and on the stone wall the vines were leafing.

Ah, his mother! He fancied that he saw the bed, and the sunlight and the nodding shadows on the window shade. For one moment he was a child again, and the cloying odour from the locust trees raised a sob into his throat.

He walked on, crossing the next field and the wood pasture, and came across last year's corn land down to the edge of the creek. Beyond were the Chambliss fields and farther still the house and the orchard lay. Should he go so far as that? Although he had come for this purpose, he stopped now and considered the matter, then he crossed very slowly.

When he reached the top of the ridge he could see the apple-trees and the red stretch of the blossoming clover. On that other day she had come to him by that way yonder, and just there to the left

he had stood. He went on rapidly and crossed the orchard fence.

The sun sank lower; up from the waterside pastures the cattle came lowing home, and in the distant fields the Negroes began to sing:

"De night done co-o-ome, my own true love !
De night done co-o-ome, my own true love !
De night done co-o-ome, my own true love !
An' I am comin' home !"

The echoes, chastened by the distance, floated back from the gullied slopes and mingled at the edge of the forest land with the shy doves' nesting-call. An infinite longing came to the man and he held out both his hands.

"Annie !" he whispered. "Annie !"

Beyond the gap in the fence he saw the flutter of a skirt and he stepped out from the cover of the trees—at least she should know that he was there. As she saw him she stopped and hesitated, their eyes met, and a quick light leaped into his.

"May I come to you, Annie?" he asked.

Her long lashes drooped, but she raised them very quickly. "No, Billy," she answered; "it is I who will come to you."

Very daintily she tripped through the clover, and he, meeting her, caught her hands in his own.

"Sweetheart !" he said, "sweetheart, I have wanted you so !"

In the west the sun was setting and the clear sky was all orange and gold. Across the green slopes and the valleys the long light streamed, and it fell like God's benediction on orchard and farmstead and field, on "big 'ouse" and on cabin, but it rested last on the plow-scarred crests of the red Carolina hills.

